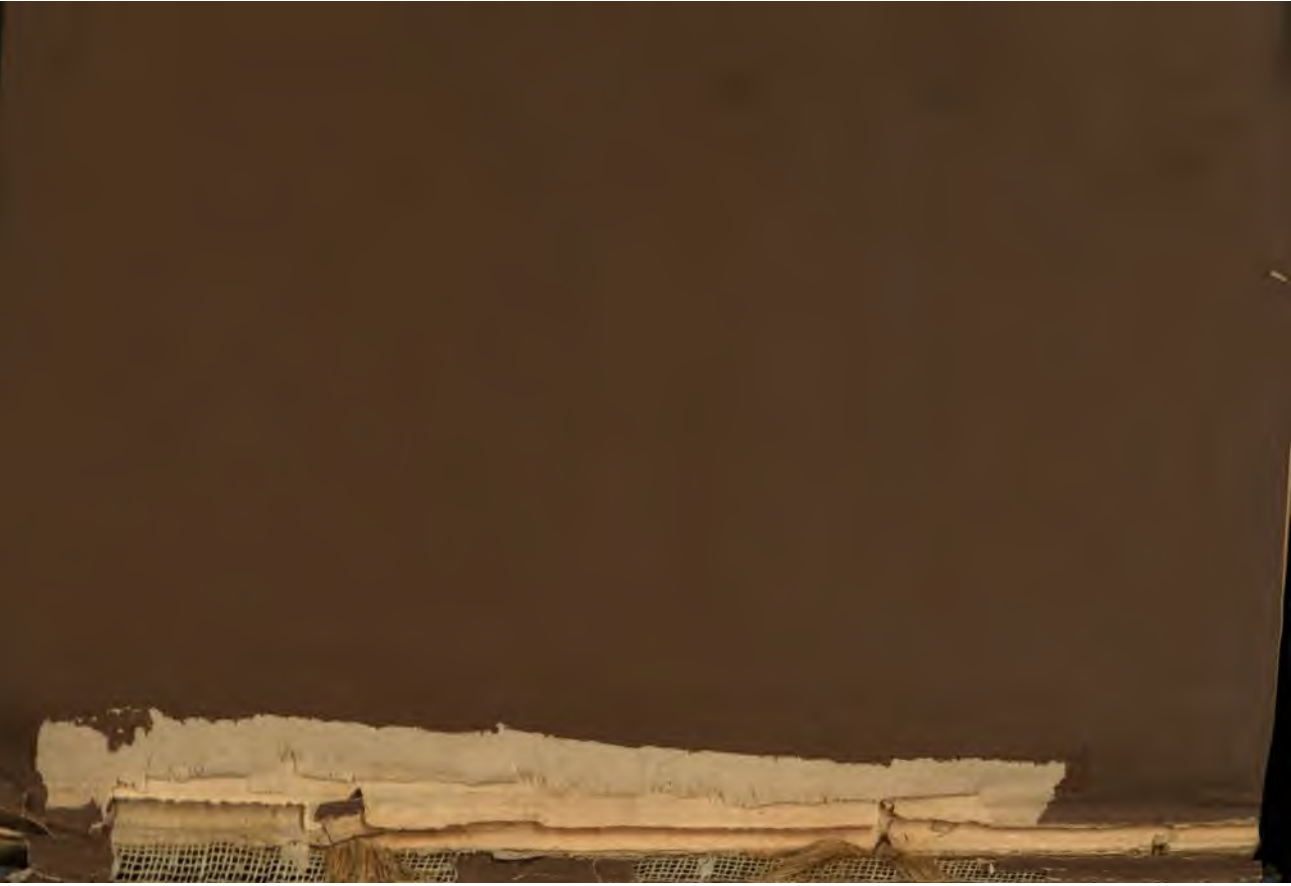

COLLECTION OF FOREIGN AUTHORS,

No. II.

GÉRARD'S MARRIAGE.

GÉRARD'S MARRIAGE

A NOVEL

FROM THE FRENCH OF

ANDRÉ THEURIET

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GÉRARD'S MARRIAGE.

I.

WHAT soothing voices there are in the provincial bells that still ring out the curfew in some of the small cities! This familiar music gently closes the labors of the day, and hushes the children to sleep in their cradles better than the nurse's lullaby. There is something comforting and sympathetic in these full, clear, and peaceful sounds. The curfew-bell of Juvigny-en-Barrois has these tones. Every evening—at eight o'clock in the winter and nine in the summer—its welcome voice is heard coming from the top of the massive clock-tower, the only ornament left in the mural crown of the ancient city by Louis XIV., the great dismantler of our Lorraine fortresses. At the moment when this story commences, a beautiful Sunday in July, 186–, the last vibrations of the bell had just died away along the vine-covered hills, where the

houses of Juvigny scattered about in the midst of the verdure descend toward the river Ornain, as an undisciplined flock of white sheep descend to the watering-place. In one of the deliciously green gardens behind the old houses of the upper city, a young man, resting his elbow on the terrace-wall, was gazing upon the declivities of the gorge of Polval, shut in between two vineyards, and already thrown into shadow by the twilight. The first stars were opening their diamond eyes above the forests bordering the horizon, and, in the distance, toward the woods, the rumbling of wagons resounded over the stony road, and then the sounds grew fainter as they passed farther away. In the midst of the comparative silence that succeeded the last notes of the bell, the east wind suddenly brought in joyous gusts the music of a rural ball hidden under the foliage of a neighboring grove. The young man raised his head and breathed long draughts of the sonorous air, as if he would drink in the melodious sounds scattered by the wind.

"Monsieur Gérard," cried the old house-servant suddenly behind him in strong nasal tones, "M. de Seigneulles has already gone to bed, Baptiste and I are going also; don't you mean to come into the house soon?"

"Presently, Manette."

The servant, having locked the gate that opened upon the vineyards, returned toward her young master.

"Good-night, then!" she said; "when you go up-stairs, don't forget to bolt the vestibule. You know your father does not like to sleep with the doors open."

"Yes, yes," he replied impatiently; "good-night!"

Gérard de Seigneulles was a young man twenty-three years old, tall and well-proportioned, though rather slight. His pale complexion and deep-blue eyes were in striking contrast with his black hair and dark beard. His countenance was mobile and nervous; the strong traits of character that found expression there were veiled and restrained by a singular timidity, and this strange blending gave to his whole bearing an appearance of reserve that was usually mistaken for an inflexible firmness. His father, a knight of St. Louis, who had been a *garde-du-corps* under the Restoration, had married late, and lost his wife a few years after his marriage. Gérard was M. de Seigneulles's only son, and had been brought up very strictly, in the old-fashioned way. The *chevalier*, as he was called at Juvigny, was an ardent and obstinate Legitimist, with little cultivation, but thoroughly upright and of proverbial loyalty. He believed in the passive obe-

dience of sons to parental authority until they became of age, and agreed with the ancient law which fixed the majority at twenty-five.

Gérard, when he was twelve years old, had been sent to a Jesuit college at Metz. He still remembered with a shudder the mortal terror that took possession of him when, on coming home for vacations, he brought back bad reports. He would often walk around the city five or six times before daring to enter the house and brave the outburst of his father's anger. Soon after his graduation he studied law at Nancy; but, even here, the same paternal severity made his life a burden. M. de Seigneulles found a boarding-place for his son with an aged relative who was very religious, and scarcely ever left the house. Gérard, in order to reach his own room, was obliged to pass through that of this respectable old dowager, which made it necessary for him to return home early, while her vigilance rendered impossible any attempt to escape at a later hour. The young man, under these conditions, did not feel anxious to lengthen out his law-studies. After having passed his examinations and received his degree, he had returned to Juvigny scarcely a fortnight before the events we are going to relate. In spite of this monastic education, Gérard loved the world with an intense affection, and the severe strictness to which he

was subjected weighed heavily upon his spirits. The instincts can no more be changed than the temperament, and the young law-student had an irresistible longing for terrestrial pleasures. The enjoyments of life had thus far been placed beyond his reach, and he determined to taste them to the full, if he could once lay hold of them. Unfortunately, on the first week after his return, he felt that his hopes were destined to disappointment. The city had few sources of amusement, and the life under the paternal roof was not very gay for a youth whose twenty-three years demanded change and excitement. M. de Seigneulles entertained no company but the parish priest and two or three worthy gentlemen of the place. In giving his son more liberty, he gave him little opportunity to profit by it. Besides, among the young people of Juvigny, whose manners and conversation were so unlike his own, Gérard was awkward and out of his element.

How he longed for a change! Impatient aspirations agitated his heart and rose to his lips. With the warm blood of youth coursing in his veins, he felt that every hour of this doleful existence was so much taken out of the enjoyment of life, and, as restless in his solitude as a squirrel in its wheel, he became the victim of weariness and languor. The day before, Reine

Lecomte, a young work-woman whom Manette employed by the day, surprised him in this despondent mood. He was walking in the garden, stretching out his arms and yawning in utter listlessness. The girl, coquettish and forward like most of the grisettes of Juvigny, cast sly glances at him while she was gathering up the linen that had been spread on the grass to dry.

"Monsieur Gérard," said she, suddenly, "you look as if you were tired to death!"

"That is true," he replied, blushing; "the days are very long."

"That is because you don't know how to have a good time. Why don't you go to the ball at the Willows to-morrow evening?"

"To the ball!" murmured Gérard, trembling, lest his father should hear.

"Yes, like all the gentlemen. . . . The country-people will think you are proud, and turn up your nose at our work-women's balls."

"They are mistaken," he replied; "the reason I do not go is because I am not acquainted with any one."

"Nonsense! You will find plenty of partners; if you will go to-morrow, I will promise you a quadrille."

Little Reine chattered in this way as she folded the linen, the mid-day sun lighting up her laughing eyes,

her turn-up nose, and her sparkling teeth. She went away, throwing at the young man a parting smile that put him into a dreamy mood.

All the afternoon he had been revolving in his mind a plan for going to the ball at the Willows, weighing in the balance the attraction of the forbidden fruit and the risk of incurring his father's wrath. This is the reason that the stirring notes of the distant orchestra roused in his mind such a peculiar emotion. A Parisian accustomed to pass his youth as he pleased would have smiled at such agitation on account of a work-woman's ball; but for Gérard, brought up like a girl, and having had scarcely a taste of the pleasures of life, this ball had the mysterious seduction of a sin committed for the first time. The Willows seemed to him like an inclosed garden, full of novel and exciting perfumes. A sudden outburst of music triumphed over his remaining hesitation. He could not go out through the gate, for Manette had carried away the key. But he climbed over the terrace-wall, leaped lightly on the elastic soil of the vineyard, and crept carefully through the vine-branches. In a quarter of an hour he was making his way under the trees of the grove.

The long avenue of plane-trees bordering an arm of the Ornain was thrown into deep shadow. In the

distance, the colored lanterns hung at the entrance of the rustic ballroom looked like fire-flies scattered in the foliage. When the music ceased, no sound was heard except the crystalline murmur of the water among the roots of the trees. When Gérard, breathless and panting, approached the rustic wooden bridge that led to the hotel, his courage vanished. He did not dare to make his appearance at this ball, since he was ignorant of its requirements, and, undecided as to what he should do, he continued his wanderings on the bank of the river. The orchestra played a waltz. He could see through the hedge the garlands of colored glass, and he caught glimpses of the waltzers as they whirled around slowly in a circle full of luminous dust. Bursts of laughter mingled with the alluring sounds of the flutes and the sharper notes of the violins; a fragrance of mignonette and clematis, exhaled from the neighboring gardens, completed his intoxication. He rushed over the bridge, paid the entrance-fee to the manager without raising his eyes, and, going along the darkest part of the hedge like a poor fellow ashamed to beg, he made his way behind the rows of matrons in their Sunday best, and curious citizens' wives, who formed the spectators at this ball in the open air.

He had scarcely recovered from his bewilderment,

when he distinguished among the dancers the pretty, irregular face of Reine Lecomte. The little coquette was quite prim in her muslin dress, and under the red roses of her pretty cap with the strings floating in the wind. Her partner was a tall and robust fellow, with a bushy, blond beard, and an open countenance, who waltzed wonderfully well, and seemed to be the most important person at the ball. He wore a soft felt-hat with a broad brim, and a loose black-velvet jacket, with the ends of a flame-colored cravat floating over the lapels; white-cassimere trousers, ornamented with a black stripe, completed this easy but rather loud toilet, which was in striking contrast with the simple redingotes and high-crowned hats of the other young men. The suppleness, the high spirits, and the self-possession of the waltzer in the velvet jacket, drew forth marks of approval from all the spectators.

"See," said one of the gossiping crowd, "little Reine admires good dancers; she will not leave M. Laheyrard."

"She is taking revenge upon the brother for the tricks the sister plays upon her," replied an ill-favored girl, one of the wall-flowers of the *fête*. "Mademoiselle Laheyrard has got away Reine's lover."

"What! has that silly Finoël taken it into his head that he can marry the fine Parisian?"

"He is always pinning himself to her petticoats, and she draws him everywhere like her shadow!"

The waltz had just ended, and Gérard with a beating heart went in search of little Reine. He remarked that most of the young people wore gloves, and, digging his hands into his pockets, he found only a pair of black ones! Very little money was wasted upon the elegances of the toilet under his father's roof, and black was the fashionable color there. While Gérard looked piteously upon this mourning livery, and wondered if it were not better to dance with ungloved hands, he heard the signal for the quadrille, and found himself directly in front of Reine Lecomte.

"That's good!" cried Reine, gayly; "you are a man of your word; give me your arm."

Gérard thrust his fingers hastily into his doleful black gloves, and Reine, hanging on his arm, walked him round through the most conspicuous parts of the ballroom. She was only too glad to show to the whole assembly that she had for a partner a handsome young man, and the heir of one of the best families in Juvigny too. Young de Seigneulles, feeling that all eyes were upon him, lost his self-possession entirely. Some of the dancers who knew him and had a pique against him, cast side-glances and tittered as he passed. Gérard felt ill at ease, and began to regret his adventure

when the orchestra commenced the prelude for the next dance. At the same moment, the jolly fellow in the velvet jacket accosted little Reine and exclaimed in a tone half bantering and half pretentious : "How is this? queen of my heart, you have played me false, and are lavishing your favors upon a stranger!"

"Yes," she replied, mincingly. "M. de Seigneulles is here for the first time, and we must encourage beginners."

"I know that you are fond of giving lessons," replied the young man with a loud burst of laughter, and raising his hat. — "My compliments, sir!" he said to Gérard, who bit his lips and blushed.

"Be quiet, you saucy fellow!" exclaimed Reine, indignantly; then, turning to her partner, she asked him if he had a *vis-à-vis*. As he replied in the negative, she again appealed to her friend with the light-colored beard. "Go, bad boy," she said, "ask one of the girls to dance with you as quick as you can, and take your place opposite to us."

"As you will, duchess!" He bowed and turned about on his heels, and soon returned with a partner.

The quadrille commenced. Gérard could not find a word to say to Reine Lecomte, as he was entirely unacquainted with the language to be used with gri-

settes. The conversation languished, and M. de Seigneulles soon thought that this ball was far from realizing his expectations. He trembled with fear lest he should make some blunder in dancing; fortunately, the quadrille was carried on in an unceremonious fashion that would have put a child at ease; at each figure, the gentlemen simply took their partners by the waist, and turned round with them. The "first gentleman forward" was a painful trial for Gérard; he felt that all eyes were fixed upon him and he advanced bashfully, hardly daring to raise his eyes, and not knowing what to do with his arms. He understood his inferiority still better when he saw his *vis-à-vis* in the velvet jacket take his turn. The youth commenced with a series of frolicsome cuts, during which he beat the air with his arms raised above his head like the elytra of a gigantic insect; suddenly he stopped short, balanced slowly and gravely in front of Gérard, touched off a grotesque bow while quickly throwing his hat backward, sent kisses from the end of his fingers to the two partners, then stretched out his hands to them and they finished with an all-round.

Gérard was amazed. "Who is this young man?" he asked Reine.

"Indeed! he is a neighbor of yours—the son of the inspector of the academy. . . . I will venture to

say that you are better acquainted with his sister, the beautiful Hélène Laheyrard."

"No, I have just returned from college, and I don't know any one now."

"You will know her soon," replied Reine, maliciously. "She makes herself conspicuous; if the rest of us dared to do one-quarter of the impudent things that are allowed in this Parisian woman, there would not be stones enough to throw at us."

"Really! and is she pretty?"

"That depends upon taste," said Reine, scornfully; "some persons dote upon her, because she has great eyes that look as if they would devour everything, and long, curly hair hanging down her back. As for me, I would not turn my head to see her pass by; but men are so stupid!"

The final galop cut short the conversation. Gérard, who had regained a little self-command, clasped his partner tightly round the waist and whirled with the rest through the ballroom. He enjoyed this part of the dancing very much. He was proud of being able to perform his part so well; and was on his way to find a partner for the next dance, when an exclamation coming from the bench where he had conducted Reine Lecomte made him retrace his steps. A companion had just shown the saucy little woman the imprint

of the fingers of Gérard's black glove on her white corsage.

"Ah! Monsieur de Seigneulles," cried the angry grisette, "you are a pretty man! See what you have done to my dress!"

The poor youth, amazed and abashed, wished he were a hundred feet underground. The spectators made a circle around them, and evil-disposed persons were not wanting. Gérard blushed, and murmured excuses, but could not think of the proper thing to say.

"I should think," said a coarse shopman behind him in a jeering tone, "if M. de Seigneulles allowed his son to go to the ball, he ought to buy a pair of yellow gloves for him."

"Nonsense!" replied another, who wished to appear witty; "all these nobles of the upper city are the same—they are in mourning for their wardrobe and their hopes."

Gérard was not patient; he turned toward the last speaker, seized him by the lapels of his coat, and shook him violently. "Sir," he cried, "I believe you intend to insult me!"

In an instant he was surrounded by a band of young shopkeepers, who asked for no better sport than to do him an ill turn. "Turn him out!" they ex-

claimed, "do these sprigs of nobility imagine that they will be masters in our ball?"

"Gently there, gentlemen!" cried a resounding voice; "is this the way you practise the rights of hospitality?" With two thrusts of his solid shoulders M. Laheyrard made his way through the group, took his place at Gérard's side, and stood ready to confront his adversaries with his fists squarely pressed against his hips, and his hat thrown backward. "What a fuss," he continued, "about a soiled dress! The gentleman will give a new one to Mademoiselle Reine, as a matter of course. But is this any excuse for behaving like village curs, which bark fiercely when a stranger enters their premises? I think your conduct is absurd, and I tell you this: the first one who takes a step toward my friend will at once feel the weight of my fists."

The assailants looked at each other, calculated mentally the weight of young Laheyrard's arm, and, after some low-toned grumbling, scattered at the first notes of the orchestra announcing a new quadrille.

Gérard warmly thanked his defender, who shrugged his shoulders and pushing De Seigneulles toward an unfrequented path—"This is doubtless your first visit to the ball at the Willows?" he asked; and, being an-

swered in the affirmative, he added: "That is easily seen, you have not got your sea-legs yet; but this will come with a little practice."

Gérard replied that his adventure had disgusted him with balls for a long time, and he wished to take leave of his new friend.

"Wait a minute!" cried the latter; "I shall not quit you. The road is dark and lonely; these scapegraces would be delighted to improve the opportunity for taking their revenge."

They went out together and walked for some distance under the plane-trees.

"If I am not mistaken," said Gérard, "we are neighbors. My name is Gérard de Seigneulles, and I believe I have the pleasure of speaking to M. Laheyrard, Jr."

"Yes," replied his companion, caressing his beard complacently, "Marius Laheyrard, student of the Faculté of Paris and editor of the *Aurore Boréale*, a paper of the new school. You may have often read verses from my pen in it."

"I beg your pardon," said Gérard, politely, "I must own that I have never seen this journal, but I will certainly procure it—"

"My signature is Mario," pursued M. Laheyrard, "out of regard for the old man—"

"What old man?" asked Gérard, who could not imagine whom he meant.

"Old Laheyrard—my father," added the poet, carelessly. "He has a horror of verses, and wished to prevent me from writing, under the pretext that my bacchanalian verses compromised his academic dignity; but I clinched his argument."

"Ah!" murmured M. de Seigneulles, astounded at the unceremonious way in which this poet treated parental authority. Then, wishing to be agreeable, he added: "I like verses very much; I admire Lamartine especially."

"Lamartine—an old jackass!" exclaimed Marius, irreverently.

"Well, but *Jocelyn*—" objected Gérard.

"*Jocelyn* is antiquated stuff!" replied M. Laheyrard, piteously. He then began with much animation to expound to his companion a poetical theory, according to which a skillful combination of curiously sonorous and highly-colored words took the place of emotion and thought. "See here," cried he, with ridiculous assumption, "we want no more of that inspiration that makes poems spring forth in a night like mushrooms; for us who chisel our words, as the sculptor his marble, the midnight oil, unheard-of effort, and unrivaled combat, mark the road that leads to fame."

Gérard opened his large eyes with astonishment. As they passed through the quiet streets, Marius, uniting example with precept, recited sonnets whose themes were tawny ages, mysterious terrors, and wild homesickness; the setting sun was compared to a drunkard surcharged with wine, and the stars to gold-fishes swimming in an azure globe. . . .

The poet, after having declaimed for a quarter of an hour, stopped to fill and light his pipe. Gérard surveyed by the light of the match the sensual and jovial appearance of his new friend, with his broad shoulders, broad back, and chubby face, and was astonished that such funereal and melancholy poetry should come from a brain overflowing with wit and merriment.

"I am dry as the sand of Sahara!" cried M. Laheyrard, smacking his lips; "and it is too bad that the *cafés* are already closed." Then, changing the subject, he extolled the virtues of foaming beer, and, passing from æsthetics to gastronomy, celebrated in epic style the luxurious dinners of Juvigny. The character of Marius presented such a mixture of strange affectation and thoughtless childishness, with jovial good-nature and agreeable eccentricity, that De Seigneulles wondered if he had to do with an insane person or a practical joker. While chatting in this way, they

had reached the Rue du Tribel, where they both lived. Marius drew from his pocket an enormous night-key. "Here," said he, "is the tiny key that opens the paternal mansion, but first let me see you safely at your own door."

"I have no key," murmured Gérard in a confused tone, "and I do not want to waken my father." Then he related the way he had jumped over the garden-wall.

Marius burst out laughing. "Ah!" said he, holding his sides, "the black gloves, your bashful dancing, and your attention to little Reine, are all explained. Well! you are a good fellow, and I hope we shall see each other often. Climb over your wall, my young friend, and good-night!"

He went home whistling. As to Gérard, he turned the corner of the street, and went on his way till he reached the vineyards; then he had but to scale the terrace. Thanks to the old moss-covered espaliers that formed natural stepping-stones, he reached the top of the wall safe and sound. He was astride there when a mocking voice cried, "Bravo!" and on raising his head he perceived the poet perched on a tree in a neighboring garden.

The hardest part was done. Gérard passed carefully through the vestibule and mounted the stairs on

tiptoe. He had reached the landing-place near his father's chamber, and thought himself already in safety, when unfortunately he struck a piece of furniture in the darkness. At the same moment, the chamber-door opened, and M. de Seigneulles made his appearance in a flannel night-dress, with a candlestick in his hand.

"What is the meaning of this, sir?" he cried out; "do you take my house for an hotel? I do not mean that my doors shall be open after ten o'clock. You should know that." And as Gérard tried to justify himself—"That's enough," he added, severely—"go to bed; you will present your excuses to-morrow."

II.

The next day, shaving-day, M. de Seigneulles was installed in his leather-covered easy-chair in the very middle of the kitchen, between his servant Manette and his barber Magdelinat. Manette had lighted a fire to warm the water for shaving, and the bright flames were reflected on the iron-work of the turnspit, the rows of saucepans, the copper pans, and the high dresser loaded with dishes. The sunlight, filtering through the red-cotton curtains, colored with a rosy tint

the gray hair of the old man and the smooth and crafty face of Magdelinat busied in strapping his razor on a leather band. The barber was a good talker, obsequious and insinuating, stinging as a wasp, and timid as a hare. He knew before any one else all the little scandals of Juvigny, and had the art of seasoning them with malicious commentaries, in order to give them a savor more or less spicy, according to the taste of his clients. M. de Seigneulles was the only one who disapproved of the barber's stories, and Magdelinat owed him a grudge on this account. He had heard of the adventure at the ball, and he longed to retail it to the chevalier, to bring down a little his haughty and assuming airs. His tongue fairly ached to tell the story, but on the other side he was restrained through fear of M. de Seigneulles's stormy outbursts; thus, all the time he was getting his razor ready for use, he was trying to invent some plan for gratifying his envious disposition without risking a quarrel with his patron. On this day, the old life-guard seemed less disposed than ever to enter into conversation with his hair-dresser. He had waked up in a very bad humor; his thin face was rigid, his gray eyes looked straight forward, his eyebrows resembled two circumflex accents, and his aquiline nose was more pinched than usual. He scarcely opened his lips, and was insensible to the cajolery of

two favorite cats that rubbed in vain against his long legs, uttering faint mews.

"Where is my son?" he asked, brusquely.

Manette replied that M. Gérard went to the woods early in the morning, and, not knowing whether he would return at noon, left orders not to wait dinner for him. M. de Seigneulles muttered a few words with an appearance of being greatly disturbed.

"M. Gérard," said Magdelinat, insinuatingly, "is a handsome fellow. He promises to become a fine dancer."

"What do you know about it?" replied M. de Seigneulles, sharply.

"Oh! I know nothing except from hearsay."

"I don't care a song for your *hearsay!* My son has never put his foot in a ballroom, and I don't believe he has made a fool of himself by dancing on the public square."

Magdelinat coughed discreetly, and gave his whole attention to making lather in the shaving-dish of costly faience. "Is the chevalier acquainted with young Laheyrard?"

"That scoundrel who blows the horn and keeps me from sleeping? Thank Heaven, no! I do not wish to be acquainted with him."

"M. Laheyrard is a fine dancer also, and a gay

fellow who goes through the world with his eyes open."

M. de Seigneulles made an impatient gesture, and Magdelinat hastened to lather his cheeks and chin; but when the chevalier, his face coated with an unctuous layer, was unable to speak a word, at that critical moment when a man is entirely at the mercy of his barber, Magdelinat perfidiously resumed: "M. Laheyrard's daring feat at the ball of the Willows is the talk of the whole country. The story is that he made a successful stand, last evening, against five or six ill-disposed rascals who wished to molest a young man, ignorant of our customs, who had come to the ball for the first time. Can such a thing be possible? They wished to pick a quarrel with a charming youth, under the pretext that he belongs to the nobility, and that his father regrets Charles X."

He was violently interrupted by the chevalier, who grasped his arm as in a vise.

"His name!" exclaimed M. de Seigneulles, through great bubbles of lather. "Was it Gérard? Put an end to your mysteries, and tell me everything, just as it is!"

"Mercy on us! let me go!" murmured the frightened barber; "I was not there. To be sure, I heard M. Gérard's name mixed with the reports, but I make

no assertion. Keep still, M. de Seigneulles, or I shall cut you with my razor."

"Tell me everything," replied the chevalier, with a sombre aspect.

The malicious hairdresser did not wait to be asked the second time. Without paying any attention to Manette's grimaces, who shook her fists at him behind the easy-chair, he unwound his skein to the last thread, giving the details of the quadrille danced by Gérard, the young man's admiration for little Reine, the scene of the black gloves, and, finally, the triumphant intervention of Marius Laheyrard. M. de Seigneulles listened without losing a word ; the muscles of his face were relaxed, his brow was downcast, and his eyes sent forth a gray glimmer of light. He seemed so mortified, that Magdelinat was afraid he had gone too far, and, seeking to mend matters, he added that, after all, Reine was a pretty girl, and that more than one would like to be in Gérard's place.

"Enough!" groaned the austere chevalier; "do you believe my son capable of dishonoring himself by paying public attention to this seamstress?"

"And what if he does? there is no need of being disturbed about it!"

"But it might injure the young woman's reputation!" cried M. de Seigneulles.

"Ah! Reine is a sly one. Besides, it is her business to take care of herself, and, if she is imprudent with M. Gérard, it is not of much consequence."

"Monsieur—Magdelinat," said the chevalier, in his most disdainful tone, "among your shopkeepers of the lower city, this kind of morality may be tolerated; but, in the class of society to which I belong, those who break windows make it a principle to pay for them. The De Seigneulles have always lived without reproach, and my son will treat this young woman with becoming respect.—"Manette," added he, rising haughtily, and wiping his chin, "tell Baptiste to saddle Bruno!"

When Bruno was saddled, the chevalier, who had put on his long brown coat and broad-brimmed hat, mounted his horse, and set out for his daily ride. Every morning, after having heard mass at seven o'clock, and completed his toilet, he made a two hours' circuit of the environs of the city. He rode at a slow pace through the streets of Juvigny, erect on his saddle, and without losing an inch of his height. When he passed before one of the plaster Virgins that ornament the vine-dressers' houses, and are always decorated with black grapes at the Feast of the Assumption, he seldom failed to stop Bruno and raise his hat devoutly. He must have been absorbed in serious reflections on this day, for he paid no attention either to the

fronts of the houses adorned with grapes, or to the plaster Virgins. His head was bent down, and he was sorrowfully turning over in his mind the base insinuations of Magdelinat.—"After all," he thought, "Gérard has not escaped contagion! It was all in vain to watch over him, bring him up religiously, and hide from his sight the spectacle of a libertine and impious world! The labor is all lost. Cursed age!" he continued, striking Bruno with the whip—for the animal was taking advantage of his master's preoccupation to nibble at the shoots of a hedge they were passing—"your leprosy infects souls nourished in the most sacred doctrines! To go and compromise himself at a grisettes' ball! Has Gérard no shame? It is a terrible thing to have sons! When they feel their twenty years, they are like those wines that begin to bubble as soon as they are in bloom, and break the bottles, unless they are cared for. Merciful Heaven! are the hearts of young men all the same?"

Yes, they are all alike! And if M. de Seigneulles, who was riding along a road bordered with linden-trees, had only looked around him, he would have seen that, in the whole creation, the smallest animals were, like young men of twenty years, a prey to the same troubles and temptations; all Nature bore the mark of the original stain. Under the honeyed foliage of the lin-

dens, magnificent butterflies in iridescent hues were pursuing each other two by two; green dragon-flies were swinging in couples on the stems of the rushes hanging over the humid ditches, and on the other side of the hedge the reapers were telling the old, old story, to their mates under the noonday sun. I do not know whether the chevalier saw these things, or if they made any impression upon him, but he warmed Bruno's sides with a vigorous blow of the whip. The horse fell into a trot, and did not stop to take breath until they reached the waste-lands of Savonnières. The sun, already high in the heavens, threw his rays over a wild and undulating landscape. Above the shady depths of the gorge of Savonnières a light mist still hovered, but on the highlands and the opposite declivities everything reflected brightness and dazzling light. Between two clusters of woodland, and through a light veil of mist, the houses of Juvigny were seen rising like the rounds of a ladder on the slope of the hill. The red roofs were brought out in bold relief from the midst of the luxuriant verdure of the gardens, the windows scintillated with a dazzling effect, and above the fading mist the arrow of St. Stephen and the clock-tower arose luminous on a sky of immaculate blue. Beyond the city there were vineyards, and then vineyards still farther on, the whole perspective

of the verdant and undulating hills being prolonged to the forests of Argonne, whose blue and distant line marked the extreme limit of the horizon. The serene tones of the bells of Juvigny were wafted in sonorous cadence through the limpid air and the joyous sunshine. The chevalier allowed Bruno to rest, and enjoyed with a kind of sensuous pleasure the whole effect of the combined harmony. This country was his own; he had breathed its hardy fragrance from childhood, and he admired it with patriotic pride. The view of the mist-covered woods and vineyards filled with the hum of locusts, the sight of the old houses of the upper city, and the tones of the same bell that had rung at his baptism, recalled doubtless to his mind the time when he was young, when he also had a heart full of tender emotion and ready to yield to temptation. He felt softened, and as if inwardly pervaded with a refreshing dew. For a moment the rigid old man wavered in his purpose, and gave himself up to more humane sentiments.—"Well," he sighed, putting spurs to Bruno, "this young man must be married; it is high time!"

Gérard's marriage! this was the subject of his meditations during the mid-day repast. The young man, dreading an explosion of paternal wrath, had taken care not to return. M. de Seigneulles finished his dinner, and then went to the lower city to pay a visit to

one of his old friends, Madame de Travanette. The widow's dwelling, located in a part of Juvigny called the Bourg, is celebrated throughout the country for its handsome flight of steps with a baluster of wrought-iron, and its façade of the sixteenth century, with elegant stone gargoyles. This mansion was then the sole point of reunion for the small remnant of the ancient local nobility. Every day, from one o'clock till four, one of the friends of the house came to play a game of backgammon with the widow. When M. de Seigneulles entered the old-fashioned drawing-room, wainscoted with oak, and hung with green tapestry, he found Abbé Volland already seated at the good lady's side. These two persons made a pleasing home-picture in the dim light coming through the half-closed shutters, and in the middle of the grand drawing-room with its faded furniture and tarnished gilding. Madame de Travanette, with a thin and bilious face under a tower of false black hair, and very erect in spite of her seventy years, was seated in one of the corners of a large easy-chair, busily occupied with her knitting-work. Abbé Volland, priest of St. Stephen's, leaning on the arm of her chair, was listening with half-closed eyes to the old lady's confidential talk. The abbé was a small, portly man, with short, plump hands, and faultlessly dressed. He was near his sixtieth year. His

thick lips, red and cleft in the centre, made his mouth look like a double cherry; when he smiled, two rows of small white teeth, square at the end, were revealed between his sensuous lips. His red mouth, turned-up nose with large nostrils, fine eyes, and thickly-frizzed gray hair, showed plainly that the curé must be a charming table-companion, with a cheerful disposition, unctuous manners, and a lively play of wit and imagination.

Abbé Volland rose as M. de Seigneulles advanced toward him, and gave him a priestly greeting resembling a courtesy. They talked at first on indifferent subjects; then, Gérard's name having been mentioned—

"How is he?" asked Madame de Travanette; "is it true that you intend to make a magistrate of him?"

"No," said the chevalier, "not under the present government. Gérard will never take an oath that he cannot keep. I reserve my son for the day when our true king will return, and trust the time may not be far distant."

"Amen!" sighed Madame de Travanette; "may the good God hear your prayer; but I greatly fear that I shall never see that day. Exiled kings are in an unfavorable position in regard to their subjects. They are like the old friends who wish to renew a correspondence interrupted for many years. When they

take up the pen, they have nothing to say, for they have not an idea in common."

The abbé, who dreaded politics, put on an absent-minded air, and rubbed imperceptible particles of dust from the sleeve of his cassock. "Meantime," said he to M. de Seigneulles, "what do you intend to do with Gérard?"

"I wish him to get married."

"So soon!"

"It is full time," replied the chevalier. He told the story of the ball at the Willows, while the curé smiled with the appearance of having already heard of the adventure. When M. de Seigneulles uttered the name of Marius Laheyrard, Madame de Travanette clasped her hands together: "Ah!" cried she, "what a family these Laheyrards are! Such a disorderly home was never seen. The children go out with their stockings full of holes, and no one in the house ever thinks of touching a needle. I have nothing to say against the father—he is a good fellow; but the mother, what a fool she is! She cannot keep a servant. I cannot understand why she had so little tact as to procure an appointment for her husband in a city where, in her youth, she was anything but a favorite, and bore no enviable reputation. She paid me a visit, which I have not returned, and I hope she will not come again."

"Her oldest daughter has decided talent," interposed the abbé.

"Poor child, I pity her—she is so badly brought up! Is it true, my good friend, that she goes to walk alone with one of the mayor's secretaries, and that she draws nude figures?"

The Abbé Volland resumed the work of brushing invisible suspicions of wool from his sleeve.

"I assure you, madame, that many of these reports are without a word of truth."

"O Monsieur Volland, you defend them—you have a weakness for mangy sheep!"

"Madame," replied the abbé, gently, "is not that true evangelical charity? Besides, Madame Laheyrard is a distant relative of mine; Hélène is my goddaughter, and she sings in church with much zeal and fervor."

"At any rate," said Madame de Travanette, obstinately, "no one receives them."

"Pardon me! Madame Grandfief, strict as she is, does not hesitate to receive Mademoiselle Laheyrard—"

"Who gives drawing-lessons to her daughter Georgette. Ah! Madame Grandfief is a crafty person!"

"Do you not mean," interrupted M. de Seigneulles,

"the iron-manufacturer's wife, of Salvanches? Has she, then, a daughter?"

"Yes," replied Madame de Travanette, "and, since you are looking for a wife for Gérard, she is the right one for you."

The chevalier listened attentively. Madame de Travanette, who had a mania for match-making, commenced a marvelous eulogy on Georgette Grandfief. She was eighteen years old, pretty, admirably brought up, and had a dowry of two hundred thousand francs; in a word, it would be an excellent match. M. de Seigneulles would have preferred a family of a higher social grade; but the old lady tried to convince him that at Juvigny the young women of the higher class were poor and seedy. She ended by offering to act as an agent in the affair. The chevalier remained in a thoughtful mood. Before committing himself, he wished to see the mother and daughter, and to judge for himself.

"Listen," said the abbé, suddenly rising to take his leave; "what I am going to propose is not strictly canonical, but Heaven will pardon me on account of the purity of my intentions. To-morrow, Madame Grandfief and her daughter are coming to the vicarage, in the afternoon, to help the young girls to make up the flowers for the fête of the Assumption. Come and

see me about four o'clock, and bring Gérard. You can see these ladies, and the young man will have an opportunity to judge for himself."

M. de Seigneulles assented, the abbé departed, and the game of backgammon commenced.

In the evening, at supper, the chevalier received his son kindly, and did not breathe a word of the events of the preceding evening. Before going to bed, he said to Gérard: "Do not go away to-morrow. We will go together and pay a visit to the Abbé Volland—and," added he, "oblige me by purchasing a pair of gray gloves; I have had enough of your black gloves!"

This was the only allusion he allowed himself to make to the adventure at the ball at the Willows.

III.

The vicarage garden was a wild spot. Arranged in terraces on the site of the old ditches of the upper city, and very much neglected by the Abbé Volland, who knew nothing about gardening, it presented specimens of the most diverse forms of cultivation. In this confusion, a perfect symbol of the spirit of Christian equality that a good pastor should maintain among his flock, the lettuce grew fraternally by the side of

the rose-trees with a hundred leaves; lilies alternated with currant-bushes, and lovage, fennel, and box mingled their aromatic fragrance with clematis and other climbing-plants. Along the lower terrace there was a walk under an arbor a hundred years old. In the centre a rotunda opened, adorned with a stone table and rustic seats. The young girls, busied in making the paper flowers, were collected there under the direction of one of the oldest women of the congregation, and a young priest very restless and frizzed like a sheep. When M. de Seigneulles and Gérard entered the passage-way leading to the house, a murmur of feminine voices, rising from the arbor like a buzzing hive, reached their ears.

The servant ushered them into the drawing-room, where the Abbé Volland was engaged in a conference with Madame de Grandfief. This lady was tall, with a flat figure and large bones; her manners were imposing and dignified, and her way of talking imperious and emphatic. Her square forehead, encircled with thin chestnut curls, her very long nose, her rectangular face terminated by a massive chin, vaguely recalled the type of the equine race. The abbé presented his visitors to her, and M. de Seigneulles entered into a solemn conversation with her upon topics of mutual interest. This ceremonious talk was tedious for Gérard,

and, just as he began to find it unendurable, the curé proposed going into the garden. The young man did not wait to be invited a second time, and as soon as they were out-doors, leaving the abbé and his guests to follow at a slow pace, he made his way toward the arbor, where he heard the gay buzzing that lured him on. When he had reached one of the entrances, he stopped a moment on the threshold of the obscure and green path, and perceived, as in the remotest part of a panorama, the group of light dresses in the midst of which the priest's cassock formed one black spot. A young girl in the centre of the group, with fair complexion and thick blond hair flowing freely over her shoulders, held a plate full of red currants, which she ate in the pretty fashion of a dainty bird.

"Do you like currants, Mademoiselle Laheyrard?" said the vicar, at the same moment, with a strong Lorraine accent.

"Yes, I like especially to pick them. How is it with you, sir?"

"I do not like solely those I pick myself," he replied, with a covetous glance.

"Do you wish for mine?"

The abbé made an affirmative sign, and, in the twinkling of an eye, the frolicsome girl, without being disturbed by the scandalized faces of those around

her, seized with the ends of her fingers a long, appetizing bunch, and moved it back and forth before the vicar's lips.

The unfortunate man blushed red as scarlet. He looked with utter astonishment upon the tempting bunch of currants, vibrating on the extremity of a pretty hand, and at the same time caught a glimpse of a white arm revealed by a loose sleeve. He murmured some confused words, and, turning on his heels, prudently beat a retreat toward the other end of the arbor, where the curé, M. de Seigneulles, and Madame Grandfief, had been witnesses of the scene.

"What impropriety!" said the prim lady, in a low voice, to the curé.

Meanwhile, the girl still held the bunch of currants in her hand.

"Then I shall eat it myself," she said, with a limpid burst of laughter; and, picking the currants from the stem, the fruit gracefully disappeared in her pretty mouth. Gérard approached; she perceived him, made a movement of surprise, and her clear brown eyes encountered the young man's admiring glances.

"Georgette," said the severe Madame Grandfief, addressing one of the working group, "put on your bonnet; it is time for us to go home."

Another girl, a brunette, with cheeks the color of

a ripe peach, a mouth shaped like a heart, large eyes slyly downcast, and a plump figure, left the group, which was still looking with horror on Mademoiselle Laheyrard, and approached Madame Grandfief.

"This is my daughter, M. de Seigneulles," said the lady, while Mademoiselle Georgette made a ceremonious bow.

"She is charming," murmured the gallant chevalier.

Abbé Volland, trying to give a stern expression to his unctuous physiognomy, took the fair transgressor aside.

"Hélène," said he, "I beg you in future to respect my vicar."

"But, reverend sir," replied the girl, in a tone maliciously confused, "I respect him, and admire him also. If you had seen with what an expression of a frightened sheep he resisted temptation. . . . He made me think of the St. Anthony of the puppet-show."

"Dreadful child!" muttered the curé, shaking his head.

When the chevalier and Gérard came out of the vicarage—"How do you like this girl?" said M. de Seigneulles.

"She is very fascinating," replied the young man,

still in a dreamy mood; "what a pleasant voice she has, and what magnificent blond hair!"

"Blond!" repeated the chevalier, stopping; "am I blind? It seemed to me that she was a brunette."

"Blond, father; with long, silken curls covering her shoulders."

M. de Seigneulles knit his brow.

"Attend to the conversation. Who is talking about that giddy creature with the flowing mane? I speak of Mademoiselle Grandfief."

"Ah," replied Gérard; "I hardly looked at her."

"Very well. When you have the honor to meet her again, be kind enough to look at her.. *I* looked at her, and it would not be disagreeable to me to have her for a daughter-in-law."

During this time, the girl whom the chevalier called a giddy creature left the vicarage in her turn, and slowly reached the Rue du Tribel.

"What prudes these provincials are!" she thought; "and how came my father to take it into his head to live in Juvigny?"

While rebelling thus against her lot, a heart-felt sigh found utterance, for the causes that had brought her family into the country returned sadly to her mind. Her father, a professor of natural philosophy, had made a virtue of necessity in quitting Paris, where

existence was becoming burdensome, with four children and a small salary.

"And to think," she said to herself, "that I must grow mouldy at Juvigny, and become perhaps a homely and dried-up old maid! Oh, no! never!"

At that moment Gérard, who was walking behind his father, turned round, recognized Mademoiselle Laheyrard, and bowed to her before going into the house.

"Really," said the maiden, interrupting brusquely her melancholy reflections, "our neighbor is decidedly good-looking. He is a handsome fellow, and has none of the pretentious airs of the young men of the city. My behavior with the vicar must have surprised him."

She began to laugh heartily in thinking of the abbé's frightened appearance.

She crossed the threshold of the paternal mansion, where the vulgar bustle of an uncomfortable and ill-regulated home awaited her. The inspector had, besides Hélène and Marius, two young children. One was a little girl ten years old, with hair always in disorder, and long, thin legs, whom the poet had nicknamed Tonton. The other was a boy, twelve years old, called Benjamin, who passed his time in playing truant, and always came home with bumps on his forehead and his clothes in tatters. All the burden of

watching and caring for these two undisciplined children fell upon Hélène. Madame Laheyrard, who had been pretty and still kept up her pretensions, though nearly fifty years old, was always restless and full of business ; but her blundering activity was of little avail to the well-being of her household. She lost whole days in discussions with the tradesmen, in quarreling with her servant, in groaning over the dearness of provisions, and the few resources of the small city. This evening, at meal-time, her complaints were more wordy and bitter than usual ; she had sent away her domestic, and the dinner showed the effects of it.

"Frightful place!" she cried, darting her angry glances toward her husband, who was peacefully eating his dessert ; "we were shamefully treated in being sent into this market-town!"

"But, my dear woman," replied M. Laheyrard, "allow me to remind you that my official position at Juvigny was obtained entirely by your application."

The inspector of the academy spoke slowly ; it was easy to see from his careful and sententious utterance that he had for a long time filled a professor's chair in the university. This measured speech exasperated Madame Laheyrard to the highest degree.

"Yes, it is all my fault!" she replied, bitterly ; "you have told me so fifty times! I made a mistake,

and I am sorry for it. The country is entirely changed, the city is disagreeable, and, as for the inhabitants, the less we say of them the better! They are ridiculously vain, and badly brought up. We have paid more than forty visits, and have scarcely received ten in return. This is also your fault, M. Laheyrard!"

"My fault?" murmured the professor. "Can I force people to come and see me?"

"You have not taken a proper position in Juvigny. Every one else gives dinners, but you have not made a single effort to introduce your wife and daughter into society."

"I make it a principle never to impose myself upon any one," replied the worthy man; "this is true dignity."

"It is true selfishness! Own that you had rather shut yourself up with your books!"

M. Laheyrard raised his head and fixed for a moment upon his wife his intelligent and troubled eyes. —"Mélanie," said he gently, "you are going too far. If we are neglected at Juvigny, you must remember that it is perhaps as much your fault as mine."

Madame Laheyrard bit her lips. This timid allusion to her youthful history was like a shower-bath to her nervous excitement. Marius filled his pipe with an

impatient air and went out to pass the rest of the evening. The inspector took refuge in the garden to get out of the way of new lamentations. Hélène hastened to clear away the table, and ran to join him under the trees in the orchard.

She alone of all the family understood M. Laheyrard and loved him. She saw him tormented by Madame Laheyrard's unreasonable demands, turned into ridicule by Marius, and disobeyed by the children, who had been taught neither submission nor respect. She knew that he was far superior to the rest of the family in heart and brain, and tried hard to make him forget all these trivial domestic discomforts by the most affectionate and devoted attentions. She interested herself in his studies; he, on his side, encouraged her in her artistic pursuits. When he was weary of his books, she enlivened him with frolicsome outbursts of wit and merriment. Hélène's gayety was to M. Laheyrard, absorbed in official bustle, like the song of the redbreast on an unpleasant winter day. This evening they walked for a long time, arm in arm, through the grass-covered garden-paths; then the old professor kissed his daughter's brow and retired to his study, while Hélène went in search of the children to put them to bed.

When she came down-stairs, weary of the noise,

Madame Laheyrard, who could not keep still in one place, had gone to attend to some errands. Hélène went into a large room near the garden which she used for a studio. Many of her studies were hung upon the wall; her easel stood in a corner near a piano covered with music, and a bouquet of wild-flowers in a faience vase adorned a round table in the centre of the apartment. The first thing that struck the girl's eye was the imprint of Tonton's five fingers on the canvas where a study was freshly outlined. Hélène stamped her foot in anger. "Stupid hovel of a house!" she cried, and giving herself up to a violent fit of ill-humor she went and sat down on the stone steps that led to the garden. There, with her elbows resting on her knees and her hands thrust into her hair, she gazed with saddened eyes on the gorge of Polval, reddened by the last rays of twilight. Juvigny weighed upon her mind. Born in Paris, and a Parisian to the end of her rosy finger-nails, she could not become accustomed to the serene sanctimoniousness, the narrow horizon, the paltry interests, of the little city. Provincial life had the effect upon her of a visit too much prolonged among tiresome people in a house smelling close and musty. Far away in the suburbs an organ with nasal tones was playing an air that she remembered hearing a year ago in some theatre on the boule-

vard. All her impressions of Parisian existence returned to her mind one after another. She remembered her balcony on the fourth story of a house in the Rue d'Assas, the railing of the Luxembourg, the tennis-court with the players in their red and white uniform, the boxes of orange-trees in a row on the terrace, where the citizens of the neighborhood and the students made their gay promenades at the hour of twilight. She mounted in imagination the stairway of the Musée, and saw again the place where she installed herself with easel and canvas to copy the "Labourage nivernais." She was homesick for all these things; she would have given two years of her life to hear once more the cry of the doorkeepers under the great chestnut-trees: "We are going to shut the gates!" Carried beyond endurance by a feeling of irritation and rebellion, "Oh! I am worn out!" she exclaimed angrily, throwing out her arms.

"If I only had the power to amuse you!" were the words she suddenly heard behind her, uttered in sharp and ringing tones.

She turned her head languidly. "Ah! M. Finoël, it is you. Good evening!"

"I had some business with M. Laheyrard; he told me that you were in your studio, and I took the liberty to enter. Do I disturb you?"

"Not in the least; I am nervous, that is all. You are welcome."

The small stature of the strange guest and his pale face, encircled by flowing hair, could scarcely be distinguished in the faint twilight. His large yellow eyes, lean cheeks, and thin lips, though indicative of a keen intellect, bore the impress of a feeble organization. Francelin Finoël was afflicted with a curvature of the spine, and his intimacy with the Laheyrard family was owing partly to this deformity. As the mayor's secretary, he was brought into official relations with the Inspector of the Academy, and, as he was obliging, an agreeable talker, and a good musician, Madame Laheyrard, little spoiled by the society of Juvigny, had welcomed cordially this sickly and deformed visitor, whom she looked upon as an inoffensive young man. "How are you to-day?" resumed Hélène, extending her hand, which he eagerly clasped in his long, lean fingers. There was in the girl's accent and gesture something friendly and sympathetic. The natural goodness of her heart prompted her to show an affectionate interest in this ill-favored being. Such compassionate familiarity surprised many persons, and those who did not know her well sometimes confounded her sympathetic pity with a deeper sentiment. Any one who saw Francelin Finoël's eyes suddenly

illuminated would conclude that he was mistaken himself, and under a delusion as to the nature of Mademoiselle Laheyrard's cordial demonstrations.

"I am always well when I am here," he replied in a caressing voice; "even the contact of your hands is sufficient to cure me."

She began to laugh, and turned toward him as she lighted the candles on the piano. "If you wish me to be very agreeable," she said, "allow me to go back and sit on the stone steps; the coolness of the evening air will relieve my nervous excitement."

In obedience to a gesture of the young man's, she resumed without ceremony the *pose* in which he had found her, resting her head upon her hands and looking aimlessly forward. Finoël, seated on the piano-stool, gazed upon her as if he were under a spell, while she remained silent and plunged in a reverie.

"I hope my unceremonious manners do not shock you," she said; "I caused a great scandal at the vicarage to-day, and I don't want to repeat the offense this evening. By-the-way, one of our young neighbors, M. de Seigneulles, was at the Abbé Volland's; do you know him?"

"Very little, but well enough not to like him."

"Why? He has an expressive face, a spirited glance, a black beard, and besides he blushes like a

school-girl. Bashfulness is as becoming to dark people as flowers on tall trees."

"Gérard de Seigneulles," pursued Finoël derisively, "is one of those handsome fellows who came into the world with gloves on; brains contracted, and vainglorious; plants of brilliant and useless luxury!"

Hélène interrupted him: "I like flowers that are of no use," she exclaimed in a decided tone; "I like everything that is bright-colored and luminous!"

The evening was warm, and the insects coming from the garden flitted around the candles.

"Them also!" replied the hunchback ironically, pointing to the victims burning in the flame.

"You are severe this evening, M. Finoël."

Hélène arose, passed before him, and seated herself at the piano.

"Sing something for me, that will put to flight our sombre fancies."

She struck a few chords, and pointed out to Finoël with her finger the score of "Don Juan" beginning at the serenade. Francelin obeyed and commenced. He had a marvelously pure and resonant voice; the sounds escaping from his lips produced the sensation of music too ideal to be human; it seemed as if a soul were singing. Hélène, while playing the accompaniment, felt the charm of this strange and penetrating voice.

When the air was finished, she turned and saw the deep glance of the hunchback fixed upon her with an embarrassing intensity.

"What beautiful hair you have!" he murmured faintly.

"Do you think so?" she said, passing her fingers through the soft ringlets with a gesture of unaffected coquetry; "nonsense! what good will it do me? One of these days I shall be obliged to cover it up with a frightful net, and become a teacher in some horrid boarding-school."

"What a joke!" said Finoël, shrugging his shoulders.

"I am not joking; we are poor, I have no dowry, and I must earn my bread. Governess or teacher, that is my lot; even that is better than to pine away in this hole of Juvigny."

"You are not one who will be allowed to pine away!" he replied emphatically; "have you then no ambition? Beautiful and richly endowed as you are, have you never dreamed of a home, children, and a husband happy to make you the queen of the little city you despise so much?"

She shook her head. "A citizen's wife living in the country! no, *je n'ai pas la bosse. . . .*"[1]

[1] "I have not the bump;" but the word *bosse* means also *hump.*

She had no sooner uttered the last word than she noticed a bitter expression on Finoël's face, and saw how keenly her heedlessness had wounded his sensitive soul. In a moment, her clear brown eyes filled with tears. Vexed at her thoughtlessness, and distressed at having hurt the young man's feelings, she eagerly held out her hand. "I wanted to say," she resumed, "that I was too ill-tempered to make a good home-loving wife."

"I understood," replied the hunchback sadly, his cheeks suffused with a deep blush; then retaining Hélène's hand in his with a passionate urgency: "You believe that I am your friend, do you not?" he asked; "promise me that you will make no final decision without consulting me . . . Swear this to me!"

She looked at him with amazement.

"I give you my word!" she said, a little frightened; "there, are you satisfied?"

"Thanks!" he murmured, releasing her hand.

Meanwhile, Madame Laheyrard, having returned from the lower city, came into the studio. The clock struck ten. Finoël took leave of the ladies and gained his lodging.

He lived in a house of rather mean appearance, on a hill-side not far from the old college. A weaver occupied the cellar and ground-floor; the rooms on

the first story were let furnished to clerks or work-women. Francelin went up to his modest chamber, which was encumbered with papers, and, not feeling in a mood for sleeping, he took a seat at the window opening upon the gardens and the college grove.

Francelin was a natural child; his mother, a hard-working washer-woman, had died about six years before. Educated as a charity scholar in the same college whose trees shaded his window, he made good progress in his studies, and managed by sheer force of will to rise above the miserable condition in which he had passed his childhood. He had climbed step by step half-way up the social ladder of Juvigny. At twenty-five, he was the leading power in the mayor's office, in the position of secretary; this was an evidence of his ability, but a very slight one in the eyes of a tenacious and ambitious youth like Finoël. The washer-woman's son dreamed of being admitted on a footing of equality into the drawing-rooms of the rich manufacturers and high officers of Juvigny. His musical talent had already secured his introduction to some families; but the doors of other houses, and these among the most aristocratic, remained obstinately closed. His ambition had received an additional spur since the arrival of the Laheyrards. Dazzled by Hélène's beauty, intoxicated by her easy grace and friendly manners, he walked in

the midst of a mirage, and dreamed of nothing less than winning Mademoiselle Laheyrard for a wife.

"Why not?" he said to himself while listening to the tick-tack of the weaver's loom near by. "Hélène is poor and will not find it easy to get a husband. I, with my mind and will, am superior to all the young men here. With her for a wife, I should have strength to shake this little world of Juvigny and to climb on the back of these people to reach my goal. I could secure the nomination of municipal judge, supplant the mayor who is a mere cipher, and—who knows?—in this time of universal suffrage, become even deputy-member—"

A sudden noise of plants being watered and the gurgling of a water-bottle on the ledge of a neighboring window recalled him to reality and caused him to beat a hasty retreat. At the same instant, the hum of a girl's voice came through the air, a head bent forward, and Reine's sly face appeared between two pots of balsamine.—"Have you got home, Francelin?" asked she.

Reine Lecomte was the weaver's niece; she had played with Finoël as a child, and they had been intimate friends for a long time. She also had nursed a dream for several years; it was to become a lady, and wear a bonnet. If she could marry Francelin, she might

reach her goal, and in her turn the ambitious grisette would say to herself, "Why not?"

As the young man remained quiet, she repeated the question.

"Yes," replied Finoël sharply, provoked at being disturbed, "I have just come home, and I am going to bed."

"You are very proud now that you go so often to see the fine ladies of the upper city! These Parisians will drive you mad, my poor Francelin."

"You will oblige me by leaving these ladies in peace," said Finoël, in an ill-natured tone; "good-night!"

"Patience!" murmured little Reine, who was determined to have the last word; "who goes in quest of wool comes back shorn, and you will be close cropped, my beautiful bleating lamb."

Finoël closed his window and went to bed in a rage.

IV.

M. DE SEIGNEULLES, pleased by his first interview with Madame Grandfief, decided to carry on with a high hand the important affair of Gérard's marriage. At his request, the Abbé Volland had broached the subject to the Grandfiefs, and, the advances having been

favorably received, the chevalier had put the financial arrangements into the hands of his notary. Like a wise man, he considered it unnecessary to mingle discussions about money with affairs of the heart. When the legal preliminaries were well established, M. de Seigneulles entered into direct relations with M. and Madame Grandfief, and it was agreed that Gérard should be authorized to pay his addresses to the young girl. The old gentleman wished his son to make a favorable impression as an agreeable man, before he was received as an accepted lover. The engagement was not to be announced until a time agreed upon by both parties. Madame Grandfief, sure of her daughter's obedience and convinced besides of the irresistible attraction of Georgette's beauty, accepted the condition, although it appeared to her ridiculously romantic.

Twice a week Gérard went to pass the afternoon at the Salvanches mansion, situated just beyond the Willows, in a large park bathed by the boisterous and fish-abounding waters of the Ornain. The young man was sometimes accompanied by his father, and sometimes chaperoned by Madame de Travanette or the Abbé Volland. These ceremonious interviews were very disagreeable. Mademoiselle Georgette, strictly carrying out her mother's instructions, sat erect on her chair, her head thrown back, and her eyes cast down,

and only took part in the conversation with becoming timidity. If Gérard spoke to her, she slowly raised her eyelids fringed with long lashes and looked first at Madame Grandfief as if seeking an answer in the maternal eyes. When she decided to speak, she seemed almost to be reciting a lesson. She was handsome, and although her large black eyes had more sparkle than depth, her turned-up nose, fresh cheeks, and pretty mouth gave her a certain piquant and sensuous grace. But she had a narrow and uncultivated mind; her foolish speeches were proverbial in the city, and her frivolous chatter, full of details of the toilet, was not calculated to inspire Gérard with transports of passionate admiration. The young man possessed a reserved nature that expanded fully only in a warm and sympathetic atmosphere. Thus he remained cold and taciturn, leaving the weight of the conversation to the abbé or Madame Travanette. These periodical visits to Salvanches were unendurable bores, and every time he went, he came home dreamy, weary, and melancholy.

One evening in August, after one of the sessions at the Grandfiefs', he returned in an unusually morose mood. Having crossed the vineyards, he was climbing the middle path, between his father's estate and the neighboring one, when loud voices and joyful outcries

made him turn his head. He saw two children who were dragging a ladder, and who disappeared behind the terrace wall at his approach.—"Tonton! Benjamin! will you bring back the ladder?" cried a silver-toned and aërial voice. Triumphant bursts of laughter were the sole reply to the entreaty. "Naughty little rogues!" continued the mysterious voice.

The foliage of a vigorous plum-tree in the neighboring orchard was suddenly agitated, and Gérard discovered Mademoiselle Hélène Laheyrard sitting between the two principal branches, holding in one hand a great piece of bread, and picking the luscious green gages with the other. She made a charming picture, her head uncovered, her hair floating in the breeze, a light rosy tint suffusing her animated features, and her eyes bright with innocent enjoyment. The sunlight playing among the green leaves threw rapid touches of light and shade on her face and neck, and the light wind agitating the border of her dress disclosed two dainty little boots. Hélène, when she saw Gérard, with a graceful movement both chaste and coquettish, covered her feet with the flowing folds of her linen skirt; then, encountering De Seigneulles's glances, she could not help laughing.

"Mademoiselle," said Gérard bowing, "allow me to go for a ladder."

"Do not give yourself the trouble, sir," she replied, "the children will bring it back of their own accord, when they see that their pranks do not trouble me."

Gérard found her marvelously lovely in the framework of green leaves, and this radiant manifestation of feminine beauty completely conquered his reserve and timidity. "Let me at least," he replied, "be your companion till Tonton brings back the ladder."

He trembled lest his request should not be favorably received; but Hélène seemed to consider it the most natural thing in the world. "Willingly," she said. "Besides, as we are neighbors, I wish to reinstate myself in your good opinion. This is the second time I have shocked you with my wild ways, and the affair of the bunch of currants was bad enough—"

The youth wished to protest. "See," continued she, interrupting him familiarly, "you must not judge me entirely by my thoughtless acts; if my brother Marius were here, he would tell you that I am a serious-minded girl, only a little cracked."

Gérard opened his eyes at the last word. "I mean to say a little giddy," she resumed smiling. "Ah! I am not a well-brought-up and wise young lady, like Georgette Grandfief. You know her, I think? If her mother surprised her perched like me in a plum-tree,

what a sermon there would be! I can hear her saying: 'Fie! for shame! mademoiselle!'"

She rolled her great eyes, pinched her lips, and mimicked the rigid woman's sententious tone with such comical drollery that Gérard could not refrain from an outburst of laughter. "You have," he exclaimed, "a fine talent for imitation."

"I possess many talents of the same kind that make me pass for a girl badly brought up. I try sometimes to put all my follies in a cage, but I forget to shut the door, and the dreadful birds fly away. Contrary to the experience of good persons, my first impulses are detestable, but the second are very good, I assure you."

"I am certain of it," cried Gérard, charmed. Leaning on the orchard fence, he admired Hélène with a real enthusiasm. One of her hands flitted back and forth among the foliage in quest of the plums, whose rosy skins bursting open from over-ripeness disclosed the juicy and golden pulp. She ate them daintily, passing, like a kitten, the end of her tongue over her juicy lips, and varied her employment by biting without ceremony into the crust of bread she held in her other hand. The sun brought out glistening points on the enamel of her small white teeth, and showed in perfection the rounded outline of her white arms beneath the flowing sleeves. Gérard, enchanted, became a new

being, and discovered in the depths of his soul an audacity of which he had never dreamed. Agitated by these sudden emotions, that mounted into his head like the foam of new wine, he was tempted to cry out to the young girl: "It is all over with me! you are too adorably beautiful!" His eyes said so at least; as to his lips, they moved as if seeking utterance, but he neither knew how, nor dared to say a single word. At last, they were loosened. "Yes," he repeated, "I am certain that you are as good as you are beautiful, good as everything that is frank and spontaneous—the flowers and the sun!"

"No compliments!" replied Hélène, in a decided tone; "besides, your comparisons are good for nothing. The sun is not always good; this very evening it is disposed to roast my shoulders so that I shall not dare to show myself at Madame Grandfief's ball, for you know they dance at Salvanches. You like dancing, I believe?" she added, with a malicious glance.

Gérard blushed and stammered at this allusion to his unfortunate adventure. "As for me," continued Hélène, "I would go five miles in the rain to dance one quadrille. Besides, as I cannot bear to sit still in my chair. I have tried to show my best side to you, in hopes that you will not be ashamed to invite me to dance at the ball next Thursday."

She was interrupted by a loud voice calling out: "Don't be impatient, Hélène; I am bringing a ladder to release you!"

Marius Laheyrard issued from a clump of nut-trees, dragging the ladder carried away by the children, and suddenly, perceiving Gérard, "By Jupiter!" he said, "this is my dancer of the black gloves.—So, you know M. de Seigneulles, sly-boots?"

Gérard explained the chance meeting, while Hélène put her feet on the upper rounds of the ladder. She drew her skirts together, jumped upon the turf, and went and leaned upon her brother's arm. Young De Seigneulles made a parting bow, but Marius took him by the arm. "No," he said impetuously, "you have put your foot on our domain, and we shall keep you. We are going to have some tolerable roast-beef and you must dine with us."

Gérard would have refused, but Hélène turned to him and gayly seconded the invitation. He could not resist her fascinating power, and went with them to the house where Marius presented him to his mother. Madame Laheyrard appeared very proud of her son's new friend, and the professor gave to his young neighbor a dignified and genial welcome that put him perfectly at ease. The dinner was for once presentable; the children behaved well, the table-linen was white,

and the roast-beef done to a turn. Marius, in high spirits from the unusual good cheer and the presence of a stranger, improved the opportunity to expound his most eccentric theories. Hélène burst out laughing, and, sometimes, when the onsets of the young poet went beyond bounds, the quiet M. Laheyrard shrugged his shoulders and exclaimed with a mild accent of reproach: "Marius, my good friend, you compromise me!" This invariably produced a more formidable explosion of the ruinous bomb-shells, for the sake of mystifying the old man.

Gérard brightened by degrees in this atmosphere of good-humor, under Hélène's sparkling smile and smiling glance. He seemed under these new conditions like a tea-leaf, which, all shriveled up before it is put into the teapot, spreads, unfolds, resumes its natural form, and gives out a delicious perfume, under the influence of the warm water. When coffee was served, he felt like a new man. He became talkative and expansive. He told the story of his solitary childhood in the old house of the upper city, his youth cloistered with the Jesuits of Metz, his law studies at Nancy with the ancient dame for a guardian. Hélène began to laugh.

"But you have a ferocious father. How terribly I must have shocked him the other day at the vicar-

age! Ah! my papa is not so severe!" she cried, caressing him.

"Yes," murmured the professor, "they lead me by the nose."

"See," continued the gay girl, taking hold of her father's nose with her taper fingers, "see how much longer it has grown! but we love our dear father very much!" she added, rubbing her soft cheek against the long beard of her best friend. A sudden emotion of tenderness came over her. Father and daughter embraced each other, while Gérard, much affected, admired the charming picture made by the old man with the long gray hair, and the girl with the golden curls. Hélène, with one foot in the air raising the bottom of her dress, and barely resting on the point of the other, had thrown her arms around her father's neck and was unwilling to release him.

M. Laheyrard disengaged himself at last and retired to his study. Madame Laheyrard went to put the children to bed, Marius was smoking in the garden, and Hélène and Gérard were alone near the door-steps, at the foot of a great mulberry-tree, which scattered its purple fruit around them. Twilight had come, the crickets chirped, and the hawk-moths buzzed around the tall phlox in full bloom. Hélène went close to a lilac-colored clump and managed to imprison in her

hands one of the insects while it was flitting around the flowery panicles; then, returning to Gérard, she half opened her fingers to let him see how well the insect imitated the movements of a small mill with its red-and-gray wings.

"Isn't it a strange-looking creature," she said, "with its pointed head and great eyes shining like black diamonds?"

Gérard, in order to see better, had taken Hélène's fingers between his own, and held them almost to the level of his lips. Mademoiselle Laheyrard felt the young man's breath on her hands. "How beautifully its wings are shaded!" murmured he.

"I would like to have a dress of just that shade of rose-color!" cried Hélène; "I have a great mind to put this sphinx under a glass so as to paint it to-morrow."

"No," replied Gérard, "be generous. It has already been shut up long enough in its chrysalis!"

"Like you!" said the girl, thoughtlessly.

"Yes, like me," replied he gayly; "this is perhaps its only festive night; do let it go free."

"That is well said," rejoined Hélène; "go then, Bohemian, take back your liberty, and use it joyously."

She opened her hands, and the sphinx flew away humming. Gérard was in a thoughtful mood. Per-

haps he thought the analogy between him and the butterfly stopped there; while the sphinx resumed its full play around the dew-laden phlox, Gérard's heart remained as a hostage in Hélène's little hands. When he went home, it seemed as if a transformation had taken place in his whole being. An obscure dawn was breaking around him like the light diffused over the woods when the moon is rising.

Gérard repeated his visits to the Laheyrards' many times. With the help of a subtile capitulation of his conscience, he looked upon these visits, made unknown to his father, as a compensation for the weariness he endured at Salvanches. He did not consider himself really engaged to Georgette; he went to the Grandfiefs' in obedience to M. de Seigneulles's wishes, but, after having accomplished this irksome duty, he took his reward in a lark at the pleasant home of his new friends, where he was welcomed with the familiarity natural to Parisians habituated to sudden intimacies. Madame Laheyrard reproached him for not coming oftener, and Hélène treated him as a friend.

She felt strangely drawn to this youth, reserved or communicative according to his mood, timid and enthusiastic, cultivated and unaffected, while his provincial education gave him the charm and freshness of wild fruit. By degrees she became very intimate with

him, showed him her drawings, sang for him, and talked to him about Paris, which he had never seen. Hélène's conversation, witty and unrestrained, sometimes earnest, sometimes full of raillery, and interlarded with foreign words borrowed from the language of the studios, disclosed to Gérard an unknown and alluring horizon. When with her, he felt as ignorant as a carp, and yet more at ease and more eloquent than anywhere else. The girl imparted to him an assurance and a confidence which he never dreamed of possessing. Not a single word of love passed between them, not even those gallant compliments that are considered common currency in social intercourse. Occasionally there were long periods of disquieting silence, a contact sweetly prolonged of two hands turning the leaves of the music, a flower gathered and presented at the moment of departure. It was nothing, and it was exquisite. The best part of love is in these mute beginnings, and Gérard enjoyed to the full this *andante* of the amorous symphony.

A few evenings later, De Seigneulles had just gone, when Francelin Finoël entered the studio. Hélène, seated at the piano, was playing over again one of her friend's favorite melodies. It seemed as if something in the atmosphere betrayed Gérard's recent presence,

for Francelin immediately led the conversation to M. de Seigneulles. "He has just gone out," said Hélène.

"Ah!" said Finoël in a low tone, "you still allow him to come here?" Then he added, with an ill-natured intention, "Every one in the city is talking of his marriage with Mademoiselle Grandfief."

Hélène grew pale. This unexpected news made a painful impression upon her. In vain did she reflect that she had no claim upon Gérard's heart; she felt the keenest suffering, and was greatly displeased with Finoël for being the bearer of the unwelcome report.

"Ah!" she retorted with an affected indifference, "there is nothing surprising about that. M. de Seigneulles is old enough to marry, and Georgette is a good match for him. Speaking of the Grandfiefs, did you know they were going to give a ball?"

"When?" demanded Finoël anxiously.

"Next Thursday. The invitations are out; father received ours yesterday, and you will be sure to find one when you go home."

Francelin was visibly disturbed. He had always desired very much to be invited to Madame Grandfief's, for she was the most exclusive person in Juvigny. To be received at her house was in the eyes of the ambitious youth equivalent to an assured entrance into the best society of the city. His agitation was so evident

that Hélène tried to encourage him. "I have spoken to Georgette about you," she said; "they will have music, and you are too good a musician to be forgotten."

But Francelin was not entirely reassured. He could not help being restless, and shortening his call he went running off to the college hill. Trembling with excitement, he unlocked his door and lighted his candle. When the vacillating light triumphed over the darkness, the hunchback made a rapid survey of the whole extent of the room. He did not see the invitation so ardently coveted, and his disappointment was extreme. Once more he resumed his search, examining carefully every article of furniture. He had no better success. Then, furious, he went down-stairs, as if life depended upon his speed, to make inquiries of the weaver's wife, and met Reine Lecomte on her way to bring him a folded paper. He snatched it from her hands. Alas! it was nothing but the daily newspaper, still inclosed in its wrapper.

"You are sure," he exclaimed, "that no invitation has come for me to the ball at Salvanches?"

"My aunt has received nothing," replied Reine, while a malicious expression lighted up her gray eyes.

Francelin's lips were pale as death. "I must have

been forgotten," he murmured, in a tone of suppressed anger.

"No, you were not forgotten," said Reine frankly, who enjoyed the discomfiture of her old comrade.

"What do you know about it?" grumbled he, darting harsh and venomous glances at her.

"I know it is as I tell you," repeated Reine pitilessly, "for I was at Salvanches when Mademoiselle Georgette proposed to her mother to invite you, and Madame Grandfief replied sharply: 'No indeed! I do not like to mix up different classes.' Is that plain enough?"

The hunchback was struck dumb. Anger filled his heart, and tears of rage and humiliation fell from his eyes. Reine perceived the burning tears. Repenting, doubtless, for striking such a brutal blow, she said, in an affectionate tone: "I have caused you much suffering, my poor Francelin, but when I see a sensible man like you making himself ridiculous in this fashion it makes me nervous, and I cannot help crying out, 'What a fool!'"

Finoël remained silent. The seamstress laid her arm on his in a friendly way. "See," she continued, "these rich people smile upon us sometimes, but they despise us in their hearts, and believe that we are made of a different clay. I know this well, for I go among

them every day, and I am quick at hearing! Remain with your own class, Francelin, at least with those that will love you for yourself alone. As to this ball, if you want to know what is going on there I will tell you, for they have engaged me to be in the dressing-room. I will report the ladies' toilets, and find out the names of all Mademoiselle Laheyrard's partners."

Reine's words entered Finoël's heart like so many arrows. He could endure them no longer, and, rudely pushing away her hand, "Enough," he said; "you go beyond bounds. I am ill; I want to be alone!"

Reine shrugged her shoulders, and went out slamming the door. Francelin sat down by the window. The night was splendid, the sky very pure and full of swarming stars. Every moment the meteors darted across the celestial pathway, and glided silently behind the college hills. It seemed as if a grand *fête* were taking place in the heavens, a mysterious ball among the stars. Finoël's lacerated heart was boiling over with hatred and envy. He wished that by some sudden convulsion these scintillating stars might fall in a rain of fire upon the city that treated him as an outcast. Oh, diversity of impressions! The hunchback looked upon the myriad moving stars above him in a rebellious mood, and the falling meteors presented to his mind nothing but an image of a sinister conflagra-

tion! At the same time, two hundred feet from him, in his little chamber on the Rue du Tribel, Gérard de Seigneulles was in a pleasant reverie, his eyes lost in the depths of the starry sky. He listened to the distant notes of Hélène's piano, recalled her gestures and slightest words, and, following with an intoxicated glance the explosion and flight of the falling stars, he compared them in his enthusiasm to radiant lilies falling like a rain of love over the dwelling of his beloved.

V.

The announcement of the ball at the Grandfiefs' had produced a great commotion in Juvigny. Nothing else was talked about from one end of the city to the other. At Salvanches, a large room, which had been unused for years, was being newly decorated—flowers had been ordered from a great distance, and the supper had been put into the hands of Parisian caterers. The dress-makers were working till midnight in fitting the costumes, making the tulle puffings, and scalloping the flounces. The livery-stable keepers rubbed their hands together over their good luck. As Salvanches was half a mile from the city, they had let in advance all their vehicles, from the plebeian pleasure-wagon suspended on its axle-trees

to the dusty berlin perched high on old-fashioned springs, and furnished with two rows of steps.

At last the great day arrived. At eight o'clock the Grandfiefs were arrayed in their best, and awaiting their guests at the entrance of the drawing-room; for at Juvigny it is the fashion to go to balls early, the ladies vying with each other in punctuality so as to secure the best places. M. Grandfief, a peaceable and methodical old man, almost strangled in his white cravat and ill at ease in his patent-leather boots, occupied the intervening time in attempting, by standing on tiptoe, to regulate the flame of the lamps and make the candles stand firm in the sockets. His son Anatole, a young collegian twelve years old, and very proud of his new jacket, made courageous efforts to get his hands into a pair of straw-colored gloves; while Georgette, in front of a mirror, studied the most fascinating attitudes and the most effective way of managing her fan. Madame Grandfief, erect and majestic, in a dress of pearl-colored velvet that modestly revealed her bony shoulders, walked with the air of a queen, throwing a final glance on the *salon* and the billiard-room where they were going to dance, and on the dressing-room, where little Reine, aided by a waiting-woman, arranged the checks and pin-cushions. In the midst of this going and coming she was at the

same time giving brief and emphatic instructions to her husband and children.

"Georgette," she said to her daughter, "you must not dance more than once with the same person."

"No, mamma ; and with M. de Seigneulles ?"

"Only twice—there will be singing between the quadrilles, and you must play the accompaniment."

"I believe I hear a carriage !" called out the collegian, who was on the watch.

As he spoke, the rolling of wheels was heard on the graveled walk of the garden, illuminated with Venetian lanterns. The whole family returned to the threshold of the *salon*, and formed into a group in appropriate attitude to receive the guests. Soon a rustling of dresses passed lightly over the stairs.

"It is only the Provenchères cousins," whispered Anatole, who had ventured a furtive glance toward the dressing-room.

The Grandfiefs changed their pompous attitude to one of disdainful indifference.

"They would be glad to come before the candles were lighted," said M. Grandfief, in an irritated voice.

"Georgette," whispered Madame Grandfief, "just go and place them yourself, so that they cannot monopolize the best seats."

The Provenchères ladies were poor relations, who

were invited as a matter of duty and treated without ceremony. They advanced all three abreast with the constrained appearance of persons who seldom go into society. The daughters, already of mature age, wore dresses with scant skirts, shoes that they had covered themselves with new satin to conceal the defects, and white gloves the worse for wear. The mother had on a kind of mantle of maroon satin, and a cap trimmed with artificial grapes.

"How beautiful everything is, my dear cousin!" she said, looking enviously upon the candelabra and the profusion of flowers in all directions. "Those on the stairway must have cost more than a hundred francs!"

Meanwhile, the guests arrived one after the other. There were majestic magistrates, with their slender wives, congealed in moire dresses; stout manufacturers, with full-blown mien and blustering words; and young ladies drowned in clouds of white tulle. There were young men, notary-clerks, professors, supernumeraries scrupulously shaven and freshly gloved, and, here and there, the sons of the spinning-masters and iron-manufacturers of the vicinity, easily recognized by their more elegant toilets and the self-assurance belonging to the rich and influential men of the country. Gérard de Seigneulles was one of the last to ar-

rive ; he was alone, for the chevalier made it a principle always to go to bed by nine o'clock. He scanned with a rapid glance the benches where the ladies were sitting. Hélène was not there, and his face betrayed an involuntary expression of disappointment. The orchestra having given the signal for the quadrille, Gérard, in obedience to his father's express command, invited Georgette Grandfief. The girl expected it, and had reserved the first dance for him ; but if she hoped that the music and animation of the ball would draw him out of his habitual reserve, she was much mistaken. The conversation dragged in a languid fashion during the intervals between the figures. Gérard did not take his eyes from the door of the *salon*, and opened his lips only to give utterance to a few insignificant monosyllables. Mademoiselle Georgette returned to her seat very much disappointed.

The crowd began to find its way into the billiard-room. The first bowl of punch had loosened the tongues and broken the ice. The gentlemen fluttered around the easy-chairs where the ladies tried the power of their fascinations while inhaling the fragrance of their bouquets. The young girls, collected in groups, whispered slyly behind their fans. The young men went from one group to another, invited their partners, and returned to the recesses behind the doors

to write down their engagements. A gay buzzing of voices, mingling with the rustling of silks and satins, filled the warm and luminous atmosphere of the spacious drawing-room.

The collegian Anatole Grandfief, seated on a bench, thought inwardly that a ball is, on the whole, not to be compared with a game of base-ball for an entertainment; in order to amuse himself, he put his fingers into his ears, opening and closing them alternately, so as to enjoy the singular contrast of all these sounds suddenly interrupted by an artificial silence, and then bursting anew into a confused uproar, like the noise of the ocean. Suddenly a real silence succeeded the hubbub of conversation, and all eyes were turned to the door, on the threshold of which appeared Madame Laheyrard, accompanied by Marius and Hélène.

The inspector was represented by Marius, who had the ladies in charge. Madame Laheyrard, in a red dress, with neck and arms uncovered, and leaning proudly on her son's arm, made her way toward Madame Grandfief. The poet was superb; his luxuriant blond beard rested on a white cravat, with broad, floating ends, and he had donned for the occasion a blue-satin waistcoat that was sure to make a sensation.

He did not wish, he said, "to be taken for a

notary, and the blue vest was destined to correct the citizen-like effect of the coat and black trousers."

Hélène's toilet excited a murmur of approbation among the men, and aroused the jealousy of all the women. A flowing dress of white gauze displayed her graceful form to great advantage ; a pliant blackberry-vine, with mingled fruits and flowers, was tastefully arranged over the silky and vapory material. Passing around the neck, it crossed at the bottom of the waist and was carried down far enough to raise lightly the folds of the skirt. A butterfly opened its azure wings at the point where the garland commenced, and the gauze revealed the delicate flesh-tint of the shoulder. Sprigs of blackberry-vine, like that on the corsage, were negligently twined in the loose curls of her magnificent golden hair. The childish coquette, sure of the effect of her simple and refined toilet, and allowing her brown eyes to wander in all directions without false modesty or affected boldness, took a seat by her mother's side with an ease and elegance that aroused once more an inward outburst of jealousy among all the women who saw her. In the twinkling of an eye, and as if by tacit agreement, a movement of retreat took place among the neighboring groups, and the new-comers were completely isolated.

Madame Grandfief, who desired, on Anatole's ac-

count, to be on good terms with the university, and was determined to treat the inspector's wife with attention, quickly perceiving this manœuvre, whispered a few words to Georgette, who went and sat down by Hélène.

"My mother," she said, "would like a little music. Did you bring one of those old songs you sing so well?"

"I know them by heart," replied Hélène, "and I am entirely at your service."

She crossed the drawing-room, and seated herself at the piano while taking off her gloves with an impatient and disturbed gesture. Then, playing her own accompaniment, in the midst of a profound silence, she sang a love-song, set to the air of an old dance, called "The Romanesque."

Hélène's voice was so tender, and at the same time so captivating, her tones so soft and so penetrating, that, in spite of the prejudices of society in Juvigny against Madame Laheyrard, demonstrations of applause burst forth.

"I don't see why they clap their hands," said the Provenchères cousin to her elder daughter, in a low tone. "I think it is highly improper for a young girl to sing such a passionate love-song."

Gérard hastened to pay his compliments to Hé-

lène. She held out her hand to him with a radiant smile.

"How do you like my toilet?" she said, turning round gayly, to show herself off to better advantage. "Does it please you?"

"You are too beautiful," replied Gérard, enraptured with the lovely picture of youth and freshness. "This garland of blackberries looks as if it had just been gathered in the forest. It gives you a wild grace that is inexpressibly charming, and the other young ladies compared with you appear like hot-house plants."

"Are you saying exactly what you think?"

"Yes, from the depths of my heart."

This frank admiration was painted so eloquently on his expressive countenance that Hélène could not doubt his sincerity. She was delighted; and all the more as Gérard, before leaving, invited her to dance the first mazurka with him.

"You are acquainted, then, with M. de Seigneulles?" asked Georgette, who approached Hélène unexpectedly.

"Certainly, we are near neighbors, and M. Gérard is an intimate friend of my brother."

"Indeed!" said Mademoiselle Grandfief; "he did not say a word to me about it. . . . Well, my dear

friend," she continued, drawing Hélène aside, "I am going to tell you a secret."

"A secret?"

"Yes, and in return you must do me a favor. A marriage between M. de Seigneulles and myself has been proposed. Did you know it?"

Hélène bent her head and remained silent. She felt as if all her happiness had suddenly melted away, and left in its place an icy chill around her heart. She had heard rumors of the engagement, but without knowing why she had looked upon them as unreliable; Georgette's words revealed the painful reality with all its crushing force.

"Yes, they wish to bring about a marriage between us," resumed the latter. "My mother imagines everything is going on well, because she and the chevalier agree in the matter, but I am not of her opinion. I think that my future husband is not a very ardent lover, and I want very much to know what he really thinks of me. After all," said Georgette, bridling up, "I am not at all in haste, and I am good enough for a lover to take the trouble to love me for myself."

Hélène, pale with emotion, bit the end of her fan with an embarrassed air, but Georgette, engrossed with her own affairs, did not notice it, and went on: "You will certainly dance with him; while you are talking,

try to lead the conversation to me, and make M. Gérard confess the state of his mind. You are the only person who can render me this service, in the first place, because you are sensible and not afraid to speak, and also because my friends are envious, and would gladly deprive me of my intended, while you—"

"Yes, I am of no account!" interrupted Hélène, seeking to conceal her trouble with a smile.

"I did not say so, but you do not intend getting married here, and that is the chief point. Do this for me, my dear Hélène, and, if in the conversation you have an opportunity to slip in a few words in my favor, do not stand on ceremony."

The orchestra struck up, and the two girls separated. It played a mazurka. It was the dance promised to Gérard, and Hélène could not, as he advanced toward her, suppress a feeling of distrust. Her heart beat quickly at the idea of delivering the message with which she was intrusted, and yet a secret curiosity urged her to bring about an explanation. She took Gérard's arm, and they commenced to dance slowly without speaking. The flutes and horns mingled now and then their sighs with the more lively notes of the stringed instruments. The couple glided over the floor in the many movements of the dance; the gentlemen erect and with their heads thrown back, the ladies more

supple and undulating, gently inclining their foreheads on the shoulders of their partners, as if the music had a languishing effect. The silk dresses reflected many colors; the white or rosy-tinted shoulders under the warm lights took on the aspect of soft and juicy fruit; the crushed flowers of the bouquets and head-dresses exhaled an intoxicating perfume. The couples made the tour of the billiard-room and gallery, and then returned to take seats in the drawing-room. Hélène and Gérard in this way reached the end of the billiard-room and there Mademoiselle Laheyrard suddenly stopped. She could not recover her usual assurance; she was very pale, and agitated her fan nervously.

"Are you tired?" asked Gérard.

"No, only a little oppressed. Let me rest a moment."

At the same time Georgette passed in front of them leaning on Marius's arm, and, while dancing, made a rapid sign to Hélène from the corner of her eye.

"Mademoiselle Grandfief appears to enjoy herself very much," began Hélène, in an unsteady voice; "she looks very pretty this evening!"

Gérard made no reply. "Dont you think so?" she continued, insisting upon his attention.

"She is very blooming," he answered, in an indifferent tone.

"Blooming—that is a poor compliment to pay her. She has pretty eyes and beautiful hair—"

"Not half so beautiful as yours!" he replied, with a caressing glance toward the soft curls that fell over the white neck of his fair partner.

"And then," Hélène went on, "she is very reserved, and that is considered a great virtue in this community; she is also a domestic woman, and very methodical, besides possessing numerous other valuable qualities."

"She possesses above all one that you have forgotten," said the young man impatiently.

"What is it?"

"She has a devoted friend!"

Their eyes met. Hélène could not help smiling, but resuming quickly a serious expression, she said: "I think you are severe—I know it is bad taste to boast too much of what concerns us closely; but, although Georgette is your *fiancée*, it seems to me you carry modesty a little too far."

Gérard's face was purple. "My *fiancée!*" he murmured; "could you believe it?"

"Every one says so, and your father makes no secret of it."

"Mademoiselle Grandfief may be a *fiancée* according to my father's dreams," exclaimed Gérard, with great

earnestness, "but she will never be mine!" He cast down his eyes, breathed slowly, and added in a trembling voice: "You are the *fiancée* of my heart, the one whom I love!" Then, frightened at his audacity, he took Hélène's hand as if intending to resume the interrupted dance.

The young girl was pale as a lily, but her bright eyes betrayed the joy of her heart. "Hélène," rejoined the young man, beside himself under the influence of her charming face and the festive music—"Hélène!"

"Enough! enough!" she murmured, in tones both imperious and tender.

At the same time she pressed his hand warmly. The whole world disappeared from Gérard's dazzled eyes; he raised the little hand throbbing in his clasp, and made a gesture as if to carry it to his lips. The room was empty, and no one could see them. He thought so at least; but the door of the billiard-room was opposite that of the dressing-room, and little Reine, puzzled by the long interview, was eagerly watching the young lovers. Gérard's passionate gesture was seized on the wing by the sly seamstress.

"I beseech you!" whispered Hélène, who also was losing her self-command. She took a few steps, marking the time of the mazurka and drawing along her

partner. "We must finish this dance," she said, "for we shall not dance together again this evening."

"I shall not dance with any one else!" replied Gérard, as the last strains of the orchestra announced the end of the mazurka.

He went away as if he were insane. Hélène was standing motionless and absorbed in the middle of the room, when she suddenly felt the light touch of a fan on her arm.

"Well," whispered Georgette behind it, "did you talk to him about me?"

Hélène trembled, and replied by an affirmative nod.

"I hope you said a good word for me?" continued Mademoiselle Grandfief.

"Oh!—yes."

"What did he say?"

Reflection had never been one of Hélène's predominating characteristics, and Georgette had questioned her in one of those moments when the mind is elsewhere, and the words spring from the lips almost without the knowledge of the speaker. Still half lost in reverie, she murmured thoughtlessly, "He said that I was a very devoted friend." She understood immediately from Mademoiselle Grandfief's amazed appearance that she had made a great mistake, and she tried to recall her words; but it was useless to make

any attempts at explanation; the blow had struck home.

"Very well," exclaimed the incensed Georgette, "as he pleases!" And as she went away she murmured to herself: "No matter; it's very strange!"

Meantime the hours flew. The young collegian, seated in the billard-room, stupefied by the punch and the heat, had ended by going to sleep. The tumult of the supper succeeded the animation of the dance. The popping of champagne mingled with the clinking of glass and the jingle of silver. The pearly smiles of the women, the witticisms whispered in their ears, the joyous calls for a reply, circulated with the glasses filled with sparkling and golden wine around the long dining-room table. In the midst of the hum of conversation, the brilliant sallies of Marius went off like rockets. He devoted himself to Georgette, and urged her traitorously to touch her lips to the foaming champagne. She enjoyed his attentions, and appeared to be easily consoled for Gérard's indifference. When the violins gave the signal for the cotillon, she took the poet's arm, and, without heeding her mother's prudent directions, danced again with her gay companion of the supper-table. The crowd thinned, the groups lessened by degrees, and the rolling of carriages began to be heard. Madame Laheyrard's carriage ar-

rived, and she made a sign to her son and daughter. Gérard hastened to Hélène and conducted her to the dressing-room. He threw the warm shawl over her shoulders to protect her from the cold morning air, and escorted the ladies to the carriage. "Let us see you very soon," said Hélène, as she jumped lightly to her mother's side.

Marius shut the door. "Drive on!" he called out to the coachman. "I shall walk home with my friend Gérard:

'Je veux baigner mon cœur dans le frais du matin,
Comme on trempe un biscuit dans du vieux chambertin.'"

It was four o'clock. In the east, above the vines, a band of purple announced the day, and the song of the lark was already heard. Marius, his brain much excited by the champagne, hummed a waltz while putting on his overcoat. Gérard walked by his side, with his eyes fixed upon the sky, as if he were in a trance. "This little *fête* was very delightful," said young Laheyrard. "Mademoiselle Georgette is charming, and her father's champagne excellent!"

Mademoiselle Grandfief's beauty was an exhaustless theme. The worthy poet, who in his verses celebrated alone goddesses of marble whiteness, seemed in reality singularly sensible to the every-day charms

of a fresh complexion and a turned-up nose. "She is as beautiful as one of Rubens's pictures!" he cried, praising her plump shoulders and rosy cheeks. "Ah! my friend, although the hard metal of my heart has been corroded by all the acids of life, I felt this evening that Cupid's arrows could still make it vibrate. I am in love."

"You also?" said Gérard, ingenuously.

"I, myself; but hush! I shall not tell you her name. Learn only that she is beautiful as the three Graces, and I have already made an avowal of my affection."

"What! already?"

"Yes. You know I have always one of my sonnets in my pocket."

"Have you read one of them to her?" asked Gérard, surprised.

"Better than that! I placed one between her dear little fingers, and she cleverly slipped it into her glove, throwing down her eyes like a startled dove."

Gérard could not help laughing at the thought of the surprise that would be pictured on the countenance of the unknown object of his friend's devotion as she deciphered the strange poetry. The poet likewise burst into a loud laugh, and the neighboring echoes reverberated for a long time the boisterous mirth of

the two friends. The larks rose joyfully toward the pearl-colored sky, and the thrushes began to warble in the depths of the vineyards.

"What beautiful weather!" exclaimed Gérard; "the sky is limpid, and the songs of the birds make one's heart glad!" He hummed the air of Hélène's song:

"Dans les chemins creux,
Leur chanson vagabonde
Semble la voix profonde
Du printemps amoureux."

"Ah! my dear friend," he said, pressing the hand of Marius, who was astonished beyond measure at the demonstrative enthusiasm of a youth ordinarily so reserved, "what a good thing life is, and how happy I feel this morning!"

"Capital! this is the way I like to see you! *Évohe! vive la jeunesse!*" cried Marius, tossing his cap into the air and catching it as it came down —"and to think that at this very hour there are bald-headed and rheumatic simpletons who lie in bed calumniating the dew of the morning! Stupid dotards!"

He had taken Gérard's arm, and they both, overflowing with the fire of youthful blood, walked with a light step toward the upper city, singing bits of ro-

mance and reciting verses. When they reached the foot of the terraces Gérard drew a night-key from his pocket; but Marius stopped him with a motion of his hand. "Fie! my dear fellow," he said, "shall we return prosily through the gate? No! remember, Romeo, the ball at the Willows and your squirrel-like suppleness. Let us scale the terrace!"

"Willingly," replied Gérard. At that moment he would have scaled the heavens to bring down a ray from the stars. They climbed foolishly along the espaliers which cracked under their feet. When they reached the parapet the rising sun welcomed them with his first beams of rosy light.

"And now," cried Marius, "let us embrace each other!"

"Yes, let us embrace each other," repeated Gérard, pressing Hélène's brother to his heart.

Standing on the wall, they gave each other a fraternal embrace regardless of the early vine-dressers coming up the hill, who looked with wondering eyes upon the strange proceedings. Then, clearing the intervening fence, they disappeared at the same time behind the hedges of the adjoining gardens.

VI.

As the sudden vaporization of ether at a high temperature produces intense cold, so the effervescence of the brain is followed by a reaction of calm and cool reflection. The law is the same in the moral or physical conditions of existence. Gérard de Seigneulles realized it on the morning after the ball at Salvanches, when he waked from a disturbed sleep to find his room inundated with sunshine. The exaltation of the evening, passing away like a subtile smoke, brought him under the influence of reason and judgment. He loved Hélène, and he had told her so; but at the same time, in the eyes of his father and the Grandfief family, he was engaged to Georgette. He could not honestly continue to play a double part. His loyalty as well as his love for Mademoiselle Laheyrard urged him to get disentangled from this questionable position. On the other hand, he could not behold without fear the means he must use to accomplish his purpose, and the explosion of paternal wrath with which the announcement of his determination would be received. Meantime, he must commence operations, for he was impatient to see Hélène again, and did not wish to appear in her presence until he had broken every tie with the Grandfiefs.

He resolved to go that very day to Salvanches, and not to return until he had positively declined all pretension to Mademoiselle Georgette's hand. He must until then continue to act a deceitful part, not caring to brave his father's anger until he had fired his ships.

When he was on the road to Salvanches, although he walked at a slow pace, the trees by the wayside seemed to him to succeed each other with an astonishing rapidity. He imagined beforehand the scene which would take place at the Grandfief's; he pictured the questions and answers, heard Madame Grandfief's solemn and sententious intonations, and foresaw that he should play a pitiable part in the drama.

He reached the gate, rang the bell, every vibration going to his heart, and inquired in a hesitating voice if the ladies would receive him. "Yes, the ladies were at work in the sitting-room." And with a light step the waiting-maid preceded him through the vestibule. He had a final shudder during the passage through the hall, but, calling up Hélène's lovely face, he quickly regained his courage and entered with a determination to bring matters to a crisis.

Madame Grandfief was standing and counting a pile of linen. Mademoiselle Georgette, seated at the window before one of those pretty reels such as are seen in Chardin's pictures, was commencing to

wind the skeins of thread. Madame Grandfief was pleased to have her daughter surprised in attending to the little details of domestic life; it gave her a thoughtful air, and was suggestive of a good housekeeper in the future. After an exchange of the usual compliments, Georgette's mother carried away the pile of linen, and left the young people alone together. She also thought that Gérard was a little too reserved, and, imagining that her presence intimidated him, resolved for the first time to leave him alone with her daughter; still, like a prudent mother, she found a place behind the door of the next room, where she could hear every word that was said.

Gérard, seated in an easy-chair, tried to think of the best way to accomplish his difficult task. Mademoiselle Georgette went on winding the thread, while the Virginia jasmines, pushing their branches through the open window inside of the room, touched lightly her black hair, carefully arranged in smooth braids. The bubbling of the Ornain was heard at intervals, for in this part of its course the river flows with the rapidity of a torrent.

The girl was the first to break the silence, begging to be excused for going on with her work. As Gérard expressed his astonishment to see her so industrious the day after the ball, she answered, "Oh, well, you

know, every one must employ his time as well as he can, and I am not blessed with Mademoiselle Laheyrard's mental resources!"

Gérard's behavior at the ball had grievously wounded her self-love, and the state of her feelings was perceptible in her aggressive tone. The young man hastened to profit by her introduction of the subject he longed to discuss. "I do not think," he said, "that Mademoiselle Laheyrard is an idle person; she is always busy about something."

"Yes, with her dresses. That is a great business. How did you like her toilet last evening?"

"I thought it was simple and in good taste."

"Simple, perhaps; that paltry gauze dress could not have cost much; but, as for the good taste, that is not the general opinion."

"It is mine," replied Gérard, dryly.

"Ah!" rejoined Georgette, spitefully; then, becoming more and more excited, she continued: "Since you are one of her friends, advise her never to put butterflies on her shoulders again."

"I shall do no such thing. Mademoiselle Laheyrard has no need to receive lessons in the art of dressing well from any one; she is too Parisian for that."

"And too coquettish to deny herself a bauble that attracts attention."

The battle had commenced. Bitter words were hurled like arrows, while, under the medlars in the garden, the boisterous gurgling of the Ornain rose in proportion, as if to adapt itself to the pitch of the quarrel.

"She is pretty enough," replied Gérard, "to dispense with coquetry."

"How zealously you defend her!" exclaimed Mademoiselle Grandfief, maliciously; "you are a very devoted friend."

"Mademoiselle Laheyrard cannot say as much of all her friends."

"The reproach does not concern me; Mademoiselle Laheyrard is not my friend. Thank Heaven, I know enough to choose better ones!"

"Every one bestows his affections as he pleases," replied Gérard, irritated in his turn; "as for me, I love her, and I will not allow her to be attacked in my presence."

This was the bitter drop destined to make the vase overflow. Mademoiselle Georgette arose, her eyes sparkling and her nostrils inflated with uncontrollable passion. "To say such a thing to me," she cried; "ah! this is too much!" Spite stopped her utterance, and, making use of that final resource of women when pushed to extremities, she burst into tears.

Madame Grandfief, who had kept faithful watch behind the door, suddenly appeared on the threshold of the room. "Sir!" she exclaimed, "your conduct is infamous; I regret extremely having received you into my house."

"Madame," said Gérard, taking his hat and bowing, "I shall take care to give you no further opportunity for such regrets."

He went out, and, though much excited by the insult, inhaled with a certain kind of enjoyment the warm out-door air, and walked rapidly homeward.

While Gérard was carrying out his *coup-d'état* at Salvanches, Francelin Finoël, too uneasy to stay in the mayor's office, resolved to pay a visit to the Laheyrards. He had heard nothing but vague reports of the Grandfief ball, for Reine Lecomte did not return to her aunt's after the *fête*; she staid at Salvanches to help to put things in order, and slept there. The hunchback revolved great projects in his head during the walk, his expressive face paler than usual, and his hurried step betrayed a feverish anxiety. Before entering the house, he stopped on the steps to wipe away the perspiration that stood in great drops upon his brow.

A sight, peaceful enough to calm agitated nerves, awaited him in the garden, where the whole family

was collected under the shade of the great mulberry-tree.

A red copper kettle full of boiling sirup was smoking on a brazier. Golden-colored plums were heaped in baskets, and Madame Laheyrard, after having delicately removed the stones, arranged them one by one in large faïence dishes, which exhaled an appetizing aroma of ripe and bruised fruit. On the right and left, Tonton and Benjamin, their faces besmeared with sweets, watched the preparations with longing looks, and frequent peals of merry laughter. Hélène, her dress protected by a white apron with a bib, and the sleeves rolled up to the elbow, stood in front of the kettle, and stirred the contents with a long-handled spoon, holding it up occasionally to see the pearly drops of sirup glisten in the sunshine.

When she perceived Finoël, she cried, "Come! you must help us in the great work of making preserves; no one will say hereafter that I am not domestic! Did you ever see a more busy housewife than I am?"

She was full of animation; the warmth of the brazier tinged her cheeks and brow with a delicate, rosy hue; her eyes were full of smiles, and her features expressed a deep inward happiness. Francelin beheld with evident discontent the group formed by

the children and Madame Laheyrard. He had depended upon finding Hélène in her studio, and his disappointment was betrayed by an increase of nervous uneasiness. He went back and forth around the brazier without replying to the frolicsome questions of the children, and regarded with a bitter contraction of the lips the strange silhouette made by his small shadow on the graveled walk.

"Did you enjoy the ball?" he said to Hélène at last.

"Wonderfully well!" replied the girl, pouring a whole dish of fruit into the boiling sirup and stirring the sweetmeats with the spoon.

The air was filled with the sweet and savory odor of the plums, and the children inhaled it with wide-open nostrils. "How good it smells!" she exclaimed; "I could eat the air as I eat a tart, it is so full of sweets. By-the-way, I looked for you last evening at Madame Grandfief's. Why were you not there?"

"It was impossible," replied Finoël, blushing.

He would not have been afraid to tell the truth to Hélène alone, but his self-love would not allow him to make the humiliating confession before the children and Madame Laheyrard. He continued his walk with downcast eyes and an embarrassed air. His ambiguous answer did not deceive the young girl; she looked

at him stealthily, saw his blush, and guessed the true motive of his absence. When the preserve was cooked to the right point she placed the smoking kettle on the stone steps, and, motioning to Finoël with her fingers, said: "Come with me to the studio; I have some new music to show you."

When they were alone she looked earnestly in the young man's face. "You have something to tell me?" she commenced.

"Yes," he said, in a low tone. He made two or three turns around the room, then continued: "I do not know whether you remember our conversation a fortnight since in this very place. You spoke of quitting Juvigny to become a governess, and you promised to take no final step without consulting me. Are you still determined to go away?"

"I cannot tell," she replied, blushing in her turn; "I own that I have scarcely thought of it since. Have you heard of a desirable situation?"

"No, but a fortnight since I made an important resolution; my position is more sure, my salary will be increased, and I think of getting married." He stopped suddenly on beholding Hélène's look of amazement. "This surprises you," he went on, "and in truth, humble and ill-shaped as I am, the idea must appear strange! The girls of Juvigny, who judge a

man by the outward appearance, would laugh in the face of any one like me who addressed such a proposition to them. It is not among them that I shall look for a wife. The woman of whom I dream must have a less superficial mind. Her intelligent glance must pierce through my disagreeable exterior to discover within the substantial qualities that make a man of real strength. I am ambitious; I have brains enough to aspire to an elevated position, and I possess the will requisite to reach it. These are the guarantees I have to offer to the woman who accepts me."

Hélène opened her eyes wider and wider as he went on with his speech. She understood the veiled meaning of Finoël's words, and trembled lest he should see that she had divined his purpose. Her surprised countenance expressed at the same time an anxious apprehension and a gentle pity. Finoël continued, his eyes cast down and still wandering restlessly around the studio: "This courageous woman, with a tender heart and a broad and courageous soul, exists; a happy chance has conducted me to her, and in her presence I am now laying open my heart."

He stopped suddenly in front of Hélène, and, looking at her with an expression of intense emotion, said: "Should you be ashamed to have me for a husband, Mademoiselle Hélène?"

This time he had spoken only too plainly, and a reply was necessary. "I?" she exclaimed, in a terrified tone.

"Am I mistaken?" he went on, with a shade of bitterness. "Have you not given me a cordial welcome in spite of my humble birth? Have you not confided to me your dreams and troubles, as to a friend?"

"Yes, as to a companion of weary and solitary hours."

"As to one who would become the companion of your whole life?"

"Of my whole life?" cried Hélène; "I never thought of it."

He bit his lips. "But," he resumed, with a certain fierceness, "did you never reflect that my thoughts would wander in that direction? When you spoke to me in gentle tones, when we sang together, and when you pressed my hand, did you not think that this familiarity would awake in my mind certain hopes, and create a kind of claim?"

"A claim!" she said, with much spirit; "you are singularly mistaken, sir: I do not love you!"

He remained speechless, directly facing her, contemplating her with eyes full of reproach. She was afraid of having been too severe, and replied in a calmer tone: "If my thoughtlessness and familiar ways

have led you to take for love what was only sympathetic companionship, I regret it from the bottom of my heart, and beg your pardon."

Her heart was really touched with compassion, and tears glistened in her eyes ; but Francelin Finoël was too much occupied with himself to comprehend the girl's sincerity.

"I am not so much mistaken as you try to make me believe. Something has occurred within a fortnight to change your heart and turn your thoughts in another direction. I shall not have to go very far to discover the mystery."

"Ah ! you provoke me at last," she retorted, full of irritation at her unwelcome lover's obstinacy. "I do not understand you, and I do not wish to hear another word."

She went toward the door, but the hunchback went before her, and barred the passage.

"You shall hear me to the end," he replied, emphatically, darting angry glances upon her ; "I am not easily deceived, and I can readily see that you prefer the name of Seigneulles to that of Finoël, but, if I am deluded, take care that you are not cruelly deceived in your turn. The handsome Gérard will compromise you ; it is all that persons belonging to his class know how to do !"

"You are insolent!" cried Hélène. Her face was flushed with angry emotion; her lips were pale, her eyes full of indignation. She seized the hat Finoël had laid on the table, and threw it into his hands; then, making the little hunchback recoil before her disdainful looks, she threw wide open the door of the vestibule. "Farewell!" she said in a stern voice, and, as Finoël, frightened, remained motionless—"go!" she repeated, stamping her foot violently.

He darted out of the house in a rage, and, to crown his exasperation, ran against his rival who was crossing the street. Finoël cast upon him a venomous glance that made Gérard feel an uncomfortable sensation like that which is said to be produced by the cold and magnetic eye of the rattlesnake. The rain began to fall; the hunchback took off his hat, and enjoyed for a long time the coolness of the drops of water on his burning brow. He returned to his bachelor's apartment, rested his arm on the table, and was now at full liberty to give vent to his rage and hatred. His emaciated features were contracted by the tumult of passions raging within his breast, and his shriveled hands twisted with nervous force the locks of his black hair.

Thus, during this miserable week, his self-love had been twice wounded to the quick—by the disappoint-

ment of not being invited to Salvanches and by Hélène's disdain. Two grievous shocks one after another had brought him to the bottom of the elevation which his ambitious will had climbed with such painful toil. Everything must be begun over again, and a feverish discouragement took possession of his mind. Within, a storm of malice and spite raged; and without, like an echo to his despair, the rain poured down in streams among the trees of the old college-garden, and moaned weirdly as it overflowed the gargoyles of the roof.

In the midst of the confusion of his bitter thoughts, he saw in fancy's eye, like a vision of a lost paradise, the fair and fascinating image of Hélène, with the triumphant face of Gérard de Seigneulles at her side. His rage redoubled.

"Oh, I will be revenged!" he cried, striking the table with his fist—"I will be revenged!"

A slight noise made him turn his head, and he perceived Reine Lecomte behind him. She had returned from Salvanches, and an irresistible longing to tell all she knew impelled her to intrude into Finoël's room. Hearing his exclamation and seeing his disturbed features, she supposed that he knew already the details of the ball, and assumed a sympathetic attitude.

"Well! my poor Francelin," she began, "was I

not right in telling you to distrust that Parisian girl? You know what happened at the ball?"

"What did happen there?" exclaimed Finoël, looking at her angrily.

"Is it possible you don't know? . . . It is the talk of the city. . . . Mademoiselle Laheyrard and M. de Seigneulles were together the whole evening; I saw them, with my own eyes, press each other's hands tenderly."

She related the scene in the billiard-room, exaggerating the story very much.

"Everybody saw it as well as I," she added, "and I am certain Mademoiselle Grandfief's engagement will be broken. . . . You were made a fool of, Francelin, and served simply as a wallflower to conceal the game of the lovers."

Finoël bit his lips and his eyes flashed.

"Have patience," continued little Reine; "M. Gérard's father will not be pleased, and a great storm will rage when he hears the news. The Parisian has not seen the end of her troubles!"

"Do you think he will prevent his son from marrying her?"

"I am sure of it, and if you would only listen to me. . . . I am of a forgiving nature, Francelin, and I

do not lay up any ill-will on account of your harsh treatment ; let us make up."

She reached out her hand, and, partly by consent and partly by force, seized Finoël's long, slender fingers, who regarded her with an inquiring and anxious eye.

"We must become good friends once more," she said, pressing his hand, "and then I will help you to gain your revenge."

VII.

When Gérard returned home he learned from Manette that his father had gone to the Grange-Allard. This valuable farm, situated about two miles from Juvigny in the midst of the forest of the Grand-Juré, was a favorite possession of M. de Seigneulles, and cared for like the apple of his eye. He sometimes staid there weeks at a time, sleeping in a garret barely furnished, eating with the farmers, and oftentimes lending a helping hand in ploughing or thrashing. He had gone there now to superintend the thrashing of the grain, and intended to pass a week. Gérard was greatly relieved by his father's absence. The rupture with the Grandfiefs had exhausted his courage, and he was not sorry to enjoy a week's respite before braving an explosion

of paternal wrath. As soon as he had dined, he went to see Hélène, and found her alone in the studio.

She shook hands with him without saying a word, for she was still much disturbed by the interview with Finoël.

"I have just been to Salvanches," he commenced, "and have given the Grandfiefs a piece of my mind. Now we all understand each other, and I shall never again step over their threshold. My heart is free, Hélène, and belongs to you entirely."

She put her finger on his lips. "Hush!" she said, with a smile; "what did you say to your father?"

"Nothing yet," he replied, a little embarrassed; "he has gone to the Grange-Allard, but he shall know everything as soon as he returns."

There was a moment's silence, and a light cloud passed over the girl's brow. "It seems to me," she rejoined, "that you have begun at the wrong end; you ought to have spoken to M. de Seigneulles before any one else."

"Do not reproach me," he replied, with a supplicating air that disarmed her; "my experience at Salvanches has left my nerves in a pitiable condition. Play something from Mozart to calm them."

She seated herself at the piano, and commenced a sonata. Gérard took a seat near her, and enjoyed the

happiness of gazing upon her by the flickering light of the candles, swayed by a breeze from the garden. He followed the wave of the blond curls over her *écru* linen corsage, the movement of her long brown eyelashes, alternately raised or cast down, the spiritual line of her profile, and the motion to and fro of her white hands on the key-board. The dropping of the rain on the leaves in the garden made a soothing bass for the light strains of the piano. The corner of the room where they sat was the only part of it that was lighted; the rest of the studio was plunged in a mysterious shadow, adding to the charm of the *tête-à-tête*, and redoubling its intimacy.

They passed in this way two whole hours scarcely speaking. Both listened to the voice of the new love singing in their hearts; and this magic inner song, blending so harmoniously with Mozart's sweet music, was sufficient to engross them. This love miraculously developed was for Gérard an enchantment which took on a new phase every minute—he had lived so long without any one to care for him, and had so long been tormented by confused desires! Passion had taken possession of him, body and mind, heart and brain. It was a tumultuous fermentation, like must in the vat, having more foam than wine, more bubbling than force. He loved Hélène with the ardor of his twenty-three

years. She was perfection in his eyes, combining every charm in the caprice of her waving golden hair, the lively sallies of her fantastic fancy, the fascinating grace of her ways, the serpentine bending of her delicate neck, the smile of her curved lips, the clear expression of her brown eyes, and the goodness of her heart.

Hélène, in her turn, felt drawn toward him by the secret influence that attracts opposite elements to each other. Gérard pleased the girl whose early youth had been passed in a skeptical, elegant, and frivolous atmosphere, by possessing qualities opposite to those marking Parisian civilization: unquestioning faith, unaffected astonishment, and that freshness of enthusiasm which is to the soul what the flower is to the fruit. The youth, owing perhaps to some mysterious influence of blood and race, though brought up in the uncultivated society of the city, had preserved the elegance of a gentleman and the delicacy of an exalted intelligence. Thus, as soon as he spoke, Hélène loved him as she knew how to love, with the promptness of a thoughtless nature, and the assurance of a pure and ardent heart.

No cloud darkened their happiness for a week. They forgot the rest of the world, and their feet no longer touched the earth. Entirely engrossed by the joy

of loving each other, they indulged in those thoughtless acts innocent in themselves, but which the society of a small city never pardons. Accompanied by the two children, they went out by the vineyard-gate, and wandered through the woodlands in search of a study for a landscape. When they found a satisfactory locality, Hélène opened her box of colors, prepared her canvas, and began to paint, while Gérard read to her. Madame Laheyrard, who saw already her daughter married to young De Seigneulles, put no restraint upon these injudicious excursions.

She had never exercised a very scrupulous supervision over Hélène, and the perspective of a noble marriage intoxicated her vanity to such a degree that she never dreamed of playing the part of a mentor. She cherished already the most ambitious hopes, and raised on this future union the scaffolding for countless castles in the air. She lost almost all the little brain she ever possessed, and, with her usual rashness of speech when among the tradesmen and gossips of the neighborhood, made transparent allusions to the time, not far away, when Hélène would be Madame de Seigneulles.

The imprudence of the young people and the absurd conduct of Madame Laheyrard were talked over and embellished with that amiable charity marking the

human race in general, and the human race of small cities in particular. In a few days, there was not a house in which the whole particulars of the scandal were not known by heart. The news made the tour of Juvigny, winding along the hovels on the hill-side, circulating in the silent streets of the upper city, and descending again through the gardens of Polval, to be lost in the depths of the wash-houses and laundries of the Ornain.

The rumors agitating the city were known to every one except those who were alone interested in the matter. Lovers live in a strange atmosphere. A luminous fluid is set free by their tenderness, betraying them, but isolating them at the same time, and making them like that bird which swims enveloped in globules of air and moves in the mountain-torrents like a diver under his bell. Hélène and Gérard did not waken from their dream until the return of M. de Seigneulles was announced.

"My father will come home to-morrow morning," said Gérard, one evening, "and I must have a talk with him."

"I shall think of you all the time while you are on the stool of repentance," replied Hélène ; she tried to smile, but she trembled inwardly at the thought that her destiny was entirely in the hands of this terrible

man ; "you must come and see us at dusk, and tell me everything."

The next day, M. de Seigneulles had Bruno saddled and returned gayly through the woods of Juré. He was very well satisfied : his harvest was gathered in ; his aftermath was unusually vigorous; and the grapes, beginning to grow black, promised an abundant vintage. While riding along the road, he said to himself that Gérard and Mademoiselle Grandfief's love-making was nearly at the same point of development as his vines, and he planned for the marriage to take place on All-saints'-day. When he had given Bruno in charge to Baptiste, he went into the kitchen, and Manette gave him two letters brought by the postman the evening before. The first was a laconic epistle from Madame Grandfief in which she coolly announced to the chevalier that she had changed her mind, and renounced an alliance for which both Gérard and her daughter had little inclination. The second letter was anonymous, and read as follows :

"Charitable friends consider it a duty to inform M. de Seigneulles of his son's compromising attentions to Mademoiselle Laheyrard. It is well known that young gentlemen of the present day like to say pretty things to young ladies without dowry. *This is the sport of princes ;* but, if M. de Seigneulles has not be-

come completely blind, he will put a stop to an intimacy that scandalizes the whole city, and gives a lamentable opinion of the morals of *well-disposed* youth."

A terrible oath almost escaped from the lips of the old guardsman. "Where is my son?" he called out. Gérard went out after breakfast, and Manette thought that he had doubtless gone to meet his father. Without listening to the servant's loquacious explanations, M. de Seigneulles, still in his riding-boots and covered with dust, hastened to Abbé Volland's. He found the curé in the arbor, walking with a measured step and reading his breviary. "Do you know what has happened?" he began, barring the abbé's progress.

The priest looked with amazement over his spectacles upon the flashing eyes and disordered toilet of his unexpected guest. "Have you had a fire at the Grange-Allard?" he asked, in his turn.

"Something much worse! Gérard's engagement is broken."

The curé wiped his spectacles with extraordinary energy.

"That is not all!" the chevalier went on, foaming with indignation; "my son has suffered himself to be inveigled by the Laheyrards, who enticed him to

their house, and he is insanely in love with the daughter, who is a mad-brained—"

The Abbé Volland vigorously rubbed the imperceptible particles of dust on his sleeve. "Yes," he said, with a sigh, "I have already heard a rumor of this sad affair, and I certainly intend to talk with Madame Laheyrard, but I must act discreetly and with such wise circumspection as will prevent scandal."

"Plague on circumspection!" growled M. de Seigneulles; "must we put on mittens to handle two adventurers who set families in an uproar? What are we coming to; and why do we live no longer in the good old times when, with a *lettre de cachet*, disobedient sons were thrown into a dungeon, and frivolous girls shut up a convent? But I know how to defend myself and those who belong to me, and I am going to ring a peal in the ears of these silly women."

"Merciful Heaven!" cried the abbé, "do not give occasion for a fresh scandal, my good friend! Hélène is my goddaughter; let me manage this affair and reprimand the girl. I promise to see these ladies this morning, as soon as I have finished my breviary."

M. de Seigneulles nodded an assent. In the bottom of his heart, he was not sorry to have the curé assume the responsibility of the proceedings. "Let it be so," he said; "you can talk without anger, and that

will be better. Tell these—persons plainly that I forbid them to receive Gérard, and that, if he insists, they must shut the door in his face. Besides, I shall see this young blackbird and stop his prattle."

He took an abrupt leave of the abbé, went home, and, going to his chamber, sat down at the window, less to dissipate his anger than to turn over in his mind the best way to reprimand the culprit.

The window looked out upon the gardens; and beyond the hedge of the next house he saw a young girl, in the full flower of the beauty of eighteen. He recognized Mademoiselle Laheyrard by her flowing curls. "Here," he thought, "is the dangerous creature who has bewitched Gérard."

Hélène was walking back and forth between the flower-beds, bordered with box, bending down to inhale the perfume of a rose, or to gather a sprig of mignonette. Notwithstanding his anger, M. de Seigneulles, old as he was, submitted involuntarily to the charm of this grace and beauty. He watched the girl's supple movements, saw her turn round lightly, and then spring to meet M. Laheyrard, who was coming down the walk, his head buried in a book. With a frolicsome gesture, she took possession of the volume that absorbed his attention, and hid it in her pocket. Then, placing her hands on her father's shoulders, she

kissed him on both cheeks, took his arm, and walked gayly by his side, making him admire her flowers, talking to him cheerfully, and drawing out peaceful smiles on the old man's grave face. The father and daughter seemed to love each other devotedly. A warm and tender affection was manifest in every movement, even in the way in which they received the slightest attentions from each other. These affectionate demonstrations, this exchange of sweet familiarity, made M. de Seigneulles utter a sigh. He had not been spoiled in this respect, having always inspired more fear than love. He could not help enjoying the marks of affection which the daughter lavished on her father. Oh ! if he had a daughter-in-law that suited him, a loving and caressing daughter-in-law, how he would spoil her and make much of her ! . . . This exhibition of filial tenderness touched tenderly some sleeping fibres in his heart ; but he would not yield to the influence, and abruptly closed the window. Gérard entered at the same time, a little pale, but with an expression of determined purpose.

"Ah ! you are here at last, sir !" exclaimed M. de Seigneulles, whose wrath was rekindled. "I hear fine things about you ! . . . Will you explain your conduct in regard to Madame Grandfief and this unbecoming rupture, which I was far from expecting ?"

"I intended telling you myself, and regret having been forestalled," said Gérard, lowering his eyes under his father's irritating glance. "I ceased my visits at Salvanches because I do not love Mademoiselle Grandfief."

"Indeed! . . . And because your heart is interested somewhere else, is it not? I know beforehand all the folly you are going to disclose; but, since you had taken this whim into your head, why did you go to Salvanches in the first place like a hypocrite, at the risk of making me play the part of Cassandra with an honorable family?"

"I beg your pardon, father. When I went with you to Madame Grandfief's, my heart was free; I thought I was acting honestly in putting an end to my visits as soon as I felt that I loved another."

"Yes; an artful deceiver, who has allured you like a bird caught by a bird-call. . . . And now what do you intend to do?"

"Marry Mademoiselle Laheyrard, after having obtained your consent."

"Nothing but that! . . . And if I refuse?"

"I shall wait."

"You will wait . . . . what?" cried M. de Seigneulles, furious; "you will wait until you are twenty-five years old, and then take advantage of the law?

. . . Am I dreaming? Is there, then, no longer either religion or family or authority? Take advantage of the law against me! Have you lost your senses, or has the revolutionary gangrene poisoned you to such a degree as to do away with all respect for yourself and others?"

For the first time Gérard dared to look his father in the face, and said, in a very firm voice: "I told you that I should wait, father, because I know you are just. . . . While seeing my patience and respectful persistence, you will be convinced of the sincerity of my affection, and you will not bring suffering upon two hearts that only wish to love you."

"Romantic phrases! No, sir; you will not put my patience to the test, and you will not make me consent to a foolish marriage. If my ways do not please you, you can leave my house immediately. I will count out your legal inheritance, and you can go far away from home to spend it, like the prodigal son—"

The old gentleman stopped in the midst of his harangue. The grasping disposition of the landholder and the proverbial Lorraine prudence reappeared. He was afraid of being taken at his word, and of being obliged to give an account of his property to his son. "Zounds!" he exclaimed, "if you carry things to this

extremity, you will carry away with you my solemn curse!"

Gérard became very pale, but did not open his lips. "I will give you a month to reflect," added the chevalier, hastily; "but, as I do not like scandal, you must make your reflections somewhere else than in Juvigny." He opened the window violently, and called, "Baptiste, harness Bruno to the cariole, and get yourself ready!" Then, turning to his son: "Baptiste will drive you immediately to the Grange-Allard. You will do me the favor of passing some weeks there; it will refresh your ideas."

A fierce impulse of rebellion took possession of Gérard at the idea of going away without seeing Hélène, who was expecting him every moment. His eyes glistened with indignant tears, but he had not passed six months with the Jesuits of Metz in vain. He had there breathed an atmosphere impregnated with discreet reserve and silent submission, and had involuntarily acquired a habit of self-control in which the body bore a larger share than the spirit. "Very well, sir," he said, bowing respectfully, "I will obey your orders."

"Go and get ready," replied the inflexible chevalier; "you will set out in half an hour."

In exactly half an hour they started at a vigorous

trot for the Grange-Allard, but, when they were in the midst of the forest of the Juré, Gérard suddenly took the reins into his own hands, stopped the carriage, and jumping out on the road: "Go to the farm by yourself" he said to the servant; "I have some business at Juvigny, and I shall return there to attend to it."

"M. Gérard," cried Baptiste, frightened, "you ought not to do this; the chevalier will turn me away!"

"My father will not know anything about it, and I promise to be at the farm before midnight. . . . Go on!" said the youth, imperiously.

He took lightly to his heels and plunged into the woods, leaving the paternal equipage to jog along at a melancholy pace to the Grange-Allard. He longed to see Hélène once more, so as to explain as well as he could the sad incidents of the day, and to assure her that nothing would ever change his heart. He wandered in the thickets till dusk; but as soon as the twilight had thrown into shadow the vineyards of Juvigny he retraced his way to the Laheyrards', entering by the vineyard-gate. A glimmering light in one of the rooms on the lower floor renewed his courage as he carefully made his way along the hedges.

Hélène was sitting in the studio, with her hands thrust into her hair and her elbows resting on the

table. A shaded lamp partially concealed the traces of recent tears and the sorrowful expression of her countenance.

She was not alone. Madame Laheyrard wandered uneasily about the room, her animated pantomime and the angry tone of her voice showing plainly enough that her nerves had been irritated by some disagreeable occurrence. "Was ever such a thing heard of?" she murmured; "and then to send such a message by the Abbé Volland! As if I did not know how to take care of my daughter! Oh, the stupid people and the cursed city! . . ."

Meantime, Gérard suddenly appeared at the open door. Hélène suppressed an exclamation of surprise. Madame Laheyrard's indignation redoubled. She advanced toward her unexpected visitor with an air of affected dignity and ill-restrained spitefulness. "M. de Seigneulles," she said, "when you come to my house I wish you to enter at the street-door, as every one else does, or rather I should prefer that you should never enter it at all. I do not care about having your father accuse me of alluring you to my house, and I am glad of the opportunity to tell you that your family is a little too presuming. Where did your father get the idea that I wanted to swallow you up? Let him take care of his son, and I will take care of my

daughter. I forbid Hélène from ever receiving you again."

Gérard tried to reply, after having vainly endeavored to interrupt the torrent of words, but Hélène, with an expression of tender entreaty, made him a sign to go away. He replied to this command by a look of passionate devotion, bowed without saying a word, and went down the steps, while Madame Laheyrard shut the glass door abruptly behind him.

VIII.

GÉRARD, stunned like a man who has received a violent blow on his head, mechanically followed the principal garden-walk. Still unable to collect his thoughts, he experienced a confused sensation of entire disaster. Reaching the gate, he inhaled the perfume of the roses and mignonette, recalling so many tender associations, then slowly descended the declivity leading through the vineyards and climbed the opposite one. When he reached the summit of the hill he leaned against a pile of moss-covered stones and gazed with a dejected air upon the row of old houses in the upper city. In the distance the light in Hélène's studio glimmered among the trees of the orchard like a sad

farewell glance. Gérard's heart was oppressed, his eyes were full of tears, and a sigh escaped his lips. It was his first great grief. In comparison with this unexpected unhappiness the sorrows of his student's life, the tediousness of his solitary youth, appeared as nothing more than wretched pin-pricks.

The clock struck ten. He remembered his promise to Baptiste, and hastily made his way into the forest. Night gives a more original and intimate character to the woods. During the day, illumined by the sun's rays, enlivened by the songs of birds and the sounds of human voices, they seem to be imbued with foreign life; during the night they are abandoned to themselves and live their own life. Under their shade a thousand sounds undiscernible in the daylight become perceptible. It is easy to distinguish the shivering of aspen-leaves incessantly agitated and nervous, the rustling of ferns as they straighten themselves up, the dull sound of an acorn falling on the moss, or the faint sigh of a microscopic fountain filtrating drop by drop among the roots. All these murmurs unite in forming a deep and penetrating harmony.

Thus in the grievous darkness enveloping Gérard's heart, a thousand simple impressions, suppressed until then by the tumultuous joy of the past week, sprang to life as it were and united their faint voices. He

remembered Hélène's least words, her most insignificant gestures, the rapid variations of her *spirituelle* and mobile mouth. The rustling of the wind in the pines recalled the music of the ball at Salvanches. . . . He saw Hélène again turning slowly round under the light of the chandeliers, with her smiling lips and her sweeping train, then seated at the piano and singing, in her pure and well-modulated voice, the song of "The Ring-Doves:"

"Dans les chemins creux,
Leur chanson vagabonde
Semble la voix profonde
Du printemps amoureux . . . ."

Alas! during this night, the amorous voice of the ring-doves was not heard in the valleys of the forest, but the funereal plaint of the wood-owl arose at intervals like the despairing call of a lost child. This resounding lamentation passed from tree to tree and died slowly away. Every time it traversed the forest, the crickets crouching in the grass suddenly ceased their chirping, and Gérard imagined that he heard the voice of his lost happiness crying out in the distance, "I shall return never more, never more!"

He quickened his pace, for the darkness of the woods oppressed him. The trees soon grew thin, the copse was succeeded by stubble-fields, houses stood out

in dim relief against the sky, and sonorous barkings awoke the echoes of the forest.

"Monsieur Gérard, is that you?" suddenly exclaimed a troubled voice.

He started, and recognized the taciturn Baptiste planted like a sentinel in front of the farm-stable. "I hope your father has not seen you," continued the old man, "he would blow me up at a great rate; but it is three o'clock, and I must be on my way—good-night!"

Gérard went to his room, groping his way along in the dark, but did not go to sleep till daybreak. He awoke about ten o'clock, without knowing where he was, but with a confused sensation of a burden weighing on his heart. He rubbed his eyes, recognized the place, and understood the anguish that oppressed his breast. During the first day of his exile, the hours dragged along with a leaden weight. Toward evening, unable to endure the strain any longer, he walked two miles to see in the distance the steeple of St. Stephen's, returned tired out, and went to bed without his supper. The next day the same programme was repeated. In the morning he buckled on his gaiters, and going through cross-paths gained a piece of high land covered with vines opposite the gardens of the upper city. He climbed a wild-pear tree, and, armed with an opera-glass, explored the land from the top of this observa-

tory. A belt of shade beyond the vine-branches of the plateau marked the locality of the gorge of Polval; then the land rose till it reached the verdant slope of the well-known garden terraces. The old houses of the Rue du Tribel with vine-covered arbors, alcoves garlanded with clematis, gray façades with small-paned windows, were easily seen among the trees, while the colors of the clumps of dahlias and the movement of the curtains in the open windows were plainly perceptible.

Gérard quickly recognizing the inspector's house, could not take his eyes from it. It was noon; St. Stephen's bell slowly rung out the *Angelus*, and the great bell in the clock-tower announced the dinner-hour to the factory-operatives. A white figure appeared suddenly on the steps near the great mulberry-tree. The young man's heart beat tumultuously, and the glass trembled in his hand. Soon the children came out, and then Marius Laheyrard; the white apparition descended the steps slowly, the others followed, and all were soon concealed behind the fruit-trees. Gérard's face grew melancholy, but, before he had time to wipe his opera-glass, the four figures reappeared at the vine-gate.

It was Hélène, without any doubt. He saw distinctly her straw bonnet with cherry-colored ribbons,

the box of colors carried by Marius, and the butterfly-nets brandished by the children. Evidently, she was going to the country to paint. The whole band went through the vine-paths and disappeared once more in the depths of Polval.

Gérard kept his position on the tree. He waited patiently, for he had a presentiment that all was not over. In a quarter of an hour he saw the butterfly-net-emerge from the vine-branches, then Marius's old felt hat with its broad brim, and finally the light *écru* linen dress. The group crossed the vines in a sloping direction so as to reach the forest at the nearest point to a picturesque valley known in the country as the Fond d'Enfer. Gérard remembered that Hélène had often desired to make a study of a patriarchal old beech-tree that shades the valley, and draws nourishment through its massive roots from a neighboring spring. He had too ardent a desire to see the girl again not to improve such a favorable combination of circumstances. Descending the tree, he made his way toward the valley, slowly and with all the minute precautions of a Mohican creeping stealthily through the untrodden forest.

He was not mistaken, for Mademoiselle Laheyrard followed the path leading to the depths of the valley. When the party reached the spring, Marius put down

the box of colors and the camp-stool at the foot of the beech-tree, and, wiping his forehead, "Amuse yourself as well as you can till I come back," he said; "I am going as far as Savonnières, to compose at my ease a sonnet in honor of the peerless beauty who has wounded my heart; for," he added, seeing a smile on Hélène's lips, "I also am smitten by Cupid's darts, and I demand of the propitious stars to soften the severity of a barbarous father, and hasten the day that shall unite our destinies. . . ."

He went away, reciting in a loud voice some lines from one of his favorite poets.

The children followed the course of the stream in pursuit of the gay butterflies that flitted back and forth under the branches of the beech-trees.

Hélène, after having dipped her hands in the spring and loosened her hair, sat down at her easel and prepared her palette. She was in a dreamy mood, and her eyes looked straight forward without seeming to see anything. And yet the light and shade on the landscape were a delight to artistic perceptions. The broad and deep valley widened gradually its wooded sides, on which every tint of foliage, from the metallic green of the oaks to the pale green of the willows, blended in beautiful harmony. The great trees of the circular border stood out in bold relief against the pure

blue sky above, and their rounded tops seemed to form the jewels of an immense green crown.

One whole side of this funnel-shaped valley was plunged into a bluish shadow. A single ray of sunshine penetrated it like a silvery vapor, and, through the foliage of the great beech, this ray showered down, as it were, thousands of luminous drops on the sombre mirror of the spring. The opposite side, on the contrary, was in full sunshine ; beyond a curtain of young willows, a blaze of sunlight glistened on the winding path—a bit of meadow-land and a row of shivering poplars. Nothing was heard in the solitude but the soft sighing of the stream, and the shouts of the children growing fainter and fainter.

Hélène, brush in hand, remained lost in thought, and her countenance, so gay when she was animated, had at this moment an expression of intense sadness. She thought constantly of Gérard, though angry with herself for allowing his image to possess such absorbing power over her fancy. Since the time he had been rudely turned away from the house by her mother, she had blamed herself very much for encouraging his attentions. A hundred times she had resolved to forget the short-lived folly and become a reasonable woman. It was useless for her to say over and over again that, since Gérard was so young and M. de Seigneulles so

proud, the tie between them could never be anything more than a passing fancy, for her young neighbor's image was ever present to her thoughts—indeed, it grew each day more despotic in its influence On the night of the ball, Hélène had given away her heart, and she felt that it would cost her too much to take it back again. . . . She sighed hopelessly; her eyes glistened like the water of the spring, and a tear rolled down her cheek. She wiped it away with an impatient movement, seized her palette, and went vigorously to work.

She had marked out on the canvas the relative value of the different tones of foliage, when a movement among the branches made her turn round. She uttered a faint cry, and became very pale; Gerard was before her. "Excuse me for surprising you," he murmured.

She shook her head, and a bright smile played over her face. The young man advanced a few steps, and then threw himself down at her feet.

"Do not scold me!" he continued, with the air of a schoolboy found out in a fault.

"No, I shall not scold you," she replied; "besides, it would be of no use to tell a falsehood, for I was thinking of you."

"Is that really true?"

"I was so sorry for letting you go away the other evening without a word of excuse or consolation! You must not blame my mother, for the Abbé Volland's lecture had excited her very much; but she is a good woman at heart, only she speaks her mind too freely."

"Oh," he replied, delighted, "I do not blame her. All I cared for was being forbidden to see you."

"Now that you have seen me, you must go away. What would people say if they should find us here? It would be enough to make the clock-tower fall over, and turn M. de Seigneulles's brain."

"You know," sighed Gérard, "he has exiled me to the farm."

Hélène could not help laughing.

"On dry bread! What a man your father is! I am afraid of him."

Gérard was silent, and did not stir. The girl turned her head toward the place where he was kneeling. "Go," she said, extending her hand; "farewell!"

He grasped Hélène's fingers, and retained them prisoners within his own. They looked at each other for a moment, and then she abruptly drew away her hand.

"Do not stay any longer," she repeated, in a voice less firm.

"Just a moment," he entreated; "let me tell you how much I love you."

Hélène looked intently upon Gérard. "I ask, in my turn," she murmured, "is it really true?"

Gérard hastened to reassure her, and she laid her hand gently on his arm.

"Listen," she went on; "I am not like the young ladies of Juvigny. I have not been taught from my cradle to weigh my words to see if they conform to the proprieties. I speak as I think and I act as I speak, spontaneously and sincerely. Are you very sure at the bottom of your heart that you love me in earnest? If you repeat it I shall believe you, but do not say so lightly. Hereafter, if you were mistaken, I should suffer too much."

"I love you," he exclaimed, passionately, "and my life is yours."

She lowered her head. "Tell me what you have done since the ball!"

Gérard recounted his sufferings, while she touched the canvas nervously with her brush. He was a long time telling the story, for it was pleasant in this shady solitude! The blue-and-brown dragon-flies flitted over the grass near the spring, the queen of the meadows embalmed the air, and the minutes passed more rapidly than the dragon-flies and were sweeter than the fra-

grance of the queen of the meadows. While they were chatting Gérard gathered from the water's edge mints, loose-strife, and red centaury, throwing them at Hélène's feet.

"I hope I don't intrude, my young friends!" cried a stentorian voice, startling them from their blissful dream.

It was Marius who appeared suddenly among the willow-branches, smiling like a fawn, with his long beard. Hélène pouted and Gérard jumped up from the grass, red as a poppy.

"Why do you blush, young Daphnis?" continued the poet; "do you take me for a jealous Cyclop or a ferocious brother? . . . I know the pains of love, and how to compassionate them. . . . I have always taken the part of persecuted lovers against guardians and fathers."

"Marius, no nonsense!" cried Hélène, impatiently.

"By Smintheus Apollo!" he replied, "I speak seriously. . . . Gérard loves you, his father tyrannizes over him, and Mamma Laheyrard forbids you to receive him. . . . I am on the side of the young against the old, and you may rely upon me.—Friend Gérard, you are an honorable man, and intend to marry my sister?"

"It is my most ardent desire and my sole preoccupation," replied Gérard, gravely.

"Very well! I agree to it!" said Marius, stretching out his great hand; "we will bring these old people to reason, and before long we will sing songs in praise of Hymen."

Hélène blushed scarlet. "It is late," she said, "and we must go home."

"You will come here again?" Gérard ventured to ask, in a hesitating tone.

"I don't know," she murmured, looking alternately at her brother and young De Seigneulles.

"Why not?" exclaimed Marius, impetuously; "I shall be present, and is not that sufficient? I should like to see any one who would dare to find it amiss!"

They all three shook hands, and Gérard returned to the farm with a joyful heart.

They met again more than once in the Fond d'Enfer. Marius accompanied his sister regularly, but as soon as they reached the spring, careless of his duties as chaperon, he left the lovers to take care of themselves and went off to beat the bushes or make a call at the public-house in Savonnières. When the 1st of September came, Marius renounced entirely this *rôle* of Mentor, to make excursions with the hunters of Juvigny.

Hélène and Gérard still continued their imprudent meetings, for the habit was formed, and they had not the courage to break it. Everything else except these stolen interviews was indifferent to them. Hélène found in the frankness of her love and in the integrity of her heart an encouraging serenity that raised her above the dread of public opinion, which makes up half of the conventional morality of worldly people. She did not understand the prudent capitulations and the cunning manœuvres which enter into the daily experience of the inhabitants of small cities, always on the watch against each other. In the matter of love, the Parisian, in spite of her pervading skepticism and apparent frivolity, behaved with less affectation and more ingenuousness than the provincial. Hélène believed in Gérard's love; in going to meet him at the Fond d'Enfer, she knew that in the eyes of the world she was guilty of an imprudence, though in her conscience she did not feel that she had committed a crime. If the hearts of the two young people had been sounded, more scruples and prejudice would have been discovered in Gérard's timid spirit than in Hélène's firm and chastely-passionate soul.

In the mean time autumn advanced. September and the vacations brought round an amusement in which the citizens of Juvigny find great enjoyment—

the snaring of small birds. In this country, abounding in forest-land, there is not a proprietor who does not make two or three hundred snares of supple and elastic hazel-branches, and arrange them along the paths of his woodland. An immense number of robins, sparrows, larks, and linnets, are taken in these snares, and the natives have a ferocious enjoyment in making a tour of inspection every morning to gather up the victims. Even the ladies share in the sport, for it affords them a pretext for picnics and dances in the open air.

It happened that, toward the end of September, a wood-merchant, whose sons were intimate with Marius, improved the vacation to organize a hunting-party, which was to wind up with a breakfast in the forest of Juré. Several ladies were invited to join their husbands and preside at the breakfast, and among them Madame Grandfief, whose ease-loving spouse was an enthusiastic Nimrod. Marius, of course, was one of the invited guests, for his liveliness and good-humor made him a general favorite. Notwithstanding his eccentric manners, and his habit of declaiming his sonnets at dessert, he was considered an agreeable guest, and pleasure-parties were incomplete without his genial presence.

On this day, the party started at dawn, and beat the waste-lands for four hours. When they arrived, toward

ten o'clock, under the trees where the tables were set, the poet had a formidable appetite. He chanced to take a seat opposite Madame Grandfief, who had come alone, not caring to expose her daughter's chaste ears to the rather coarse jests of a hunter's breakfast. She replied to Marius's salutation by a cool inclination of the head, and took on such a dignified air that he hastened to escape from the haughty glance that took away his appetite.

He found some compensation in looking upon the table with its appetizing collection of hams, *pâtés*, and crabs, spread out between two rows of glasses and bottles. When the roast-mutton was served, the poet's heart expanded. He had for neighbors two rustic hunters of unaffected appearance and unpolished manners. The apparent good-nature of these peaceable citizens deceived Marius, and he resolved to enliven his breakfast by making sport of them. As soon as he saw a juicy slice of meat on his plate, he uncorked a bottle of wine, filled his glass and those of his companions.

"Let's see this claret," he exclaimed; "I have, as St. Amand says, one of those burning throats that nothing satisfies. The day that I was born it must have rained salt!"

"Distrust the light wine of the country, sir," replied his neighbor on the right; "it has an innocent

air, but it is wicked at the bottom, and gets into one's head as if the devil were in it."

"Wicked? this wine-whey! you must not tell that to me!" replied Marius, disdainfully emptying his glass; "know, my dear sir, that the juice of the vine never troubles the serenity of my brain. Nothing affects me but the opium of the Chinese, the hasheesh of the Indians, or the raki of the Polynesians."

"Indeed?" said the other, with a sly laugh under which he concealed his artfulness and malice. At the same time he gave his neighbor on the left a significant wink.

The poet continued his prattle, all the time devouring his mutton and drinking his wine.

"See," he went on, "two or three glasses of wine may derange the equilibrium of quiet people occupied in sheep-farming, but artists, accustomed to storms of thought, laugh at such slight causes for intoxication. We soar in the midst of the tempest, like the albatross."

"That is to say," sneered his companion, "that you poets live in wine as fish do in the water."

"Well spoken, honest neighbor!" exclaimed Marius; "pour me out a bumper for your pains. Don't be afraid—an overflowing glass, and now to your health!"

The loud laughter of the guests, the rattling of forks, and the marvelous stories of the hunters, prevented the conversation from being distinctly heard. The poet, carried away by his own words, and urged on by his neighbors, who did not allow his glass to stand a moment empty, became more loquacious as the tumult at the table increased. Odd comparisons, strange fancies, lyric invocations flowed from his lips, mingled with memories of former Rabelaisian scenes.

"By Jupiter!" he called out, "I believe you are offering me a water-bottle! Plague on that drink for frogs! Do you take me for a water-drinker like my noble friend Gérard de Seigneulles?"

"M. Gérard," murmured his companion on the right; "I expected to meet him here, but I do not see him anywhere."

"His father has put him in quarantine at the Grange-Allard," replied the neighbor on the left, who was a notary in a village near the farm. "I hear the young man has a very inflammable heart, and M. de Seigneulles has sent him to the country to calm his spirit, as wine is carried down-cellar to cool it."

"Ah!" said Marius, laughing heartily, "what good will that do?"

"What do you mean, young man?"

"I mean," replied the poet, "that love laughs at

the threats of cruel fathers, and the grates of dungeons."

The notary winked again to his neighbors as much as to say he was going to bring the poet to confession.

"What," he resumed, "do you pretend that young De Seigneulles is not at the Grange-Allard?"

"He is there and he is not there," replied Marius, with a comically mysterious air.

He suddenly perceived Madame Grandfief's cold eyes fixed upon him, and recovered a grain of common-sense from the depth of his brain.

"Hush! you would like to have me tell tales, conrade; but I am silent as the tomb—I shall not reveal in what verdant corner of the forest this young Endymion goes to meet the Diana of his dreams.—Drink once more!"

The champagne had been opened, and the foaming wine circulated freely around the table.

"To your health, young man," the notary went on, touching glasses with Marius, "but don't tell us any more such stories. It is a long distance from the farm to Juvigny; and a lover, however devoted, does not walk three miles going and three miles returning, to warble plaintively under the windows of his Dulcinea."

"What do you know about it?" sneered Marius, whom contradiction irritated; "you talk like a raw

recruit. Nothing is impossible to lovers. The woods lend their leafy solitudes, and the beeches of the Fond d'Enfer are thick enough to keep the idle words of love from the ears of prattlers."

He thought he was speaking in a low tone, but, like all persons whose tongues are loosened by wine, his voice was on a high key, and the sound of his words rose above the pitch of the conversation going on around him. Madame Grandfief, erect on her chair, fixed her agate eyes on Marius Laheyrard and did not lose a word he said.

"You believe, then, that they meet in the Fond d'Enfer?" repeated the notary, insidiously.

"Who spoke of the Fond d'Enfer?" stammered Marius. "Ah! notary more obstinate than a mule, you plead the false to find out the true! but I have not said a word and I shall not say a word. Mum! friendship is sacred with me—I drink to the goddess Muta! I drink to the silence of the forests, and to Olympian poetry!"

After this, Marius's perceptions were utterly confused. Through the mists of intoxication Madame Grandfief's dull eyes seemed to act upon his reason like the fixed glance of a serpent when fascinating a bird. Some one got up at dessert to sing, and drew forth shouts of laughter; when leaving his place, he fell

heavily on the turf, and Marius had a vague sensation that in some incomprehensible way he was himself this hilarious guest. He constantly repeated, "My limbs give way, but my head is firm!"

In spite of his resistance, he was lifted by two compassionate arms, and put into a tilbury that happened to be on the way to Juvigny. As he was driven along, he thought there was a high wind, and that the trees bowed to him as he passed. The carriage stopped before the inspector's house, and the poet, sustained by the same indulgent arms, was carried to his chamber and laid upon his iron bed, without being undressed. The furniture moved around him with a giddy rapidity. He closed his eyes, and all consciousness was gone.

IX.

THE guests were so boisterous that Marius's mishap passed almost unperceived. Coffee was served, the ladies left the table and scattered in groups under the trees. Soon none were left behind but the obstinate old hunters shouting out their exploits with the clamorous communicativeness produced by an abundant breakfast. Every one felt the exhilarating influence of the good cheer. The young people organized round

dances on the grass. Madame Grandfief herself, thoughtful at first, seemed suddenly to thaw out. A smile hovered over her thin lips, and an assumed glimmer of gayety lighted her sombre eyes. She proposed the only game appropriate for these excited brains and impatient limbs. "Choose a goal," she said, "and we will go there, playing the Gate of St. Nicolas on the way."

The Gate of St. Nicolas is a familiar game in Lorraine. The players taking hold of hands form a long chain, each link being represented alternately by a lady and gentleman. The two leaders at the head raise their clasped hands in such a way as to form an arch. "Is the Gate of St. Nicolas open?" cry the rest of the band in chorus, and, when an answer is given in the affirmative, the whole file passes rapidly under this improvised arch, singing roundelays. The young people at the end are then at the head of the chain, and form an arch in their turn, the long garland winding and unwinding in this way as long as there is space for it to move in.

The proposition of the iron-manufacturer's wife was enthusiastically accepted, and followed by an animated discussion as to the most desirable goal. Several localities were suggested, but none of them proved satisfactory, until Madame Grandfief decided the ques-

tion, saying in an authoritative tone, "Let us go to the Fond d'Enfer, the road is much pleasanter."

They took hold of hands, began to hum the lively airs, and the long file was quickly in motion. It was pleasant to see this living and supple chain unwind as it followed the turns of the road like a gay farandole. Arms were thrown out, feet kept time to the music, floating skirts touched the ferns lightly, and shouts of laughter rang through the air until the gay procession disappeared under the leaves.

The afternoon advanced. Hélène and Gérard had met as usual under the beeches of the Fond d'Enfer, close by the bubbling fountain. Although the girl had brought her canvas and brushes, she scarcely touched them, but watched in melancholy mood the light motion of the first falling leaves as they were scattered in the stream.

"You look anxious," said Gérard; "what are you thinking of?

"Of ourselves," she answered, gravely.

"Does that make you sad? Are we not happy?"

"Shall we be so long? I have a presentiment that we are suspected and watched. The other evening after leaving you, I met that little Reine, and I think she suspected something by the way she stared at me."

"Are you sorry for having come here?"

"No," she answered, quickly; "if I am afraid, it is not for myself. I am thinking of my father, who is so good, and might lose his situation if our secret meetings were discovered."

"You are right," sighed Gérard, "and I am a selfish creature."

He became pensive in his turn.

"This condition of affairs must not last any longer," he exclaimed, earnestly; "I love you, I am master of my own person, and I will make my father listen to reason."

Hélène opened her eyes in astonishment. Her half-incredulous and half-interrogatory expression seemed to say, "How will you set about it?"

"I will entreat him once more," continued Gérard, "and, if he is inexorable, I will threaten to leave the house."

Hélène shook her head and a faint smile flitted over her lips.

"If he is such a man as you describe, he would let you go away, and then—?"

"I would wait till I was twenty-five years old, and demand my legal inheritance."

"Hélène frowned. "In that case I would refuse to accept you," she replied, proudly. "I will never en-

ter a family where I have been rejected by the head of it."

Gérard made a movement of discouragement. He could scarcely speak, he was so oppressed by the hopelessness of his position. Hélène perceived it, and her heart was full of sympathy. She held out her hand to him, saying in a tone of assumed cheerfulness:

"We must not think of these troubles any more. What is the use of tormenting ourselves this afternoon? See how beautiful the valley is under the influence of the setting sun! It is good to be here, and I should like to fill my eyes with every detail of the landscape, that I may remember it forever!"

She gazed earnestly, and as if for the last time, upon the wooded declivities thrown into deep shadow, the bushes full of ripe blackberries, and the meadows covered with flowers. Gérard still kept possession of her hand, as they sat silently side by side, and around them reigned the dreamy serenity of the last fine days of the season. Nature in autumn imparts a sort of dreamy languor even to those possessing sufficient firmness of character to withstand its influence. The inexperience of these two youthful souls, unarmed against such seductions, added to the voluptuous intoxication of the warm September day. Hélène and Gérard felt its alluring power; the palms of their hands seemed to blend

and form a part of the same flesh. Their charmed eyes exchanged glances so disquieting that their hearts were oppressed, and their lips were cold. In the silence of the woods, the stream found utterance in crystalline notes, and the red-breast warbled its caressing song. Hélène's brown eyes attracted Gérard like a loadstone; already his head inclined toward hers, and he was about to impress the first kiss upon her pure brow, when a confused sound of many voices suspended and as it were chilled the kiss upon his lips; suddenly the long chain of the Gate of St. Nicolas descended from the summit of the hill to the bottom of the valley, with Madame Grandfief at the head.

It was like a thunder-bolt. The two young people scarcely realized what had happened before the gay band dispersed along the stream. A solemn silence succeeded the songs and shouts of laughter at the recognition of the lovers. Hélène, blushing deeply, bent over her sketch; Gérard had risen from his seat, and stood near her, looking pale and with compressed lips. The new-comers, unprepared for such an encounter, appeared as much embarrassed as those they had just surprised; Madame Grandfief alone preserved her composure. She passed in front of the unfortunate Gérard without deigning to notice him; then addressing the girl in a tone of bitter irony: "We disturb you, made-

moiselle!" said the pitiless matron. She glanced at the canvas scarcely touched with color and continued, "Your drawing is remarkably well done!"

She turned to her companions without troubling herself any more for Hélène's unfortunate position: "Let us continue our walk," she said, "and leave Mademoiselle Laheyrard to go on with her work."

She led the way to a woodland path, and the whole file of matrons and young people followed her, not without darting malicious glances upon the culprits, and showing their disapprobation by expressive gestures. As soon as the intruders were concealed by the underwood, the affair was loudly discussed, and the worst construction put upon it. The breeze brought to Hélène's ear this cruel response of Madame Grandfief: "Nonsense! it is very fortunate for her; her character is ruined, and she will make this a pretext for inducing him to marry her!"

The branches by degrees ceased to shiver, the sound of footsteps diminished, voices grew faint, and silence once more reigned over the valley. The only sounds that disturbed the solitude were again the gentle murmur of the brook and the warbling of the robin, which, frightened for a moment, had bravely resumed its song. Gérard then dared to look at Hélène, who remained motionless, her forehead resting on her hands. He

was alarmed at the tragic expression of her pallid face, and a dolorous exclamation escaped from his lips.

"Ah!" whispered the young girl, "I am ruined!"

Young De Seigneulles seemed beside himself, and wrung his hands despairingly. "I have ruined you!" he exclaimed; "this miserable woman is taking her revenge on you, because I refused to marry her daughter!"

He walked back and forth along the stream, cursing Madame Grandfief, lisping incoherent words, and completely unnerved.

"What will become of us?" he said, at last, "and what is the best thing to do? To-morrow the whole city will know everything, and my father will never forgive me!"

In the midst of this disorder, Hélène discovered indistinctly that Gérard had a terrible fear of his father, which took away all freedom of thought. She felt that she must have courage for both, and, rising from her seat, collected together her painting-materials, and extended her hand to her companion.

"We must separate," she said, sadly; "return to the farm, and do not leave it for several days."

"Shut myself up there without hearing from you?" cried Gérard, "never! I should be consumed with a slow fire. I shall go to Juvigny, and face the storm."

"I forbid it," replied Hélène, resolutely; "your passionate haste would spoil everything. Obey me, if you love me. Keep out of the way for five or six days, until Marius writes to you. . . . Adieu! think of me."

She hastily clasped Gérard's hand, and went off in the direction of Juvigny.

"Hélène!" he called out, broken-hearted; but she did not listen to him, and soon her light dress, seen occasionally through the low branches, disappeared entirely in a winding of the path.

She reached home by the shortest route, and found the house still in commotion on account of Marius's adventure. Tonton and Benjamin told her that their brother had come back from the breakfast in such a condition that it was necessary to carry him to his chamber. Hélène was, however, too much disturbed to lend an attentive ear to the children's chatter.

She was silent during dinner, hardly daring to raise her eyes toward M. Laheyrard, who had been kept in ignorance of the recent folly of his elder son. On leaving the table, she took refuge in her own room, under pretense of a headache. Tears came to relieve her overburdened heart. What was she going to do now? To-morrow, perhaps this very evening, the story of the Fond d'Enfer would be circulated through

the city, and plenty of charitable persons would be found to tell the news to M. de Seigneulles, and even to M. Laheyrard. The position of the inspector at Juvigny, already so uncomfortable, would be greatly injured, if not fatally disturbed, by this scandal. Her tears redoubled at this thought, and at the same time the spiteful words of Georgette's mother resounded in her ears :

"Nonsense ! it is very fortunate for her : her character is ruined, and she will make this a pretext for inducing him to marry her !"

The indignation she felt at the injurious accusation revived her drooping courage.

"No," murmured her rebellious spirit; "I will show them that, in spite of my thoughtlessness, I am better than they are !"

The idea of returning to Paris to seek employment as a teacher found its way gradually to her mind. The complete absorption that had taken possession of her faculties for a whole month made her forget her plans for going away, but the experience of the Fond d'Enfer had dissipated forever this vision of happiness. She cherished no longer any illusions, and felt that her love was hopeless. Gérard would never dare to struggle against his father, and, if he dared, his energy would be of no avail against the old gentleman's

obstinacy. Domestic quarrels would irritate him without leading to any result, and perhaps later, embittered and exhausted by the struggle, he would regret that he had ever seen Hélène, or loved her. It was dreadful to think of such a possibility, or to be the means of making trouble in any one's family. It would be far better to go away. She would be forgotten as soon as she left Juvigny; the scene of the Fond d'Enfer would fade away, and M. Laheyrard would run no further risk of losing his place.

Hélène repeated all these things to herself while the last rays of the setting sun poured obliquely into her room, and the deep snoring of Marius, the unconscious author of the tragedy, was plainly heard through the partition. The principal of the boarding-school where she was educated in Paris had often proposed to her to come back and teach drawing. Hélène wrote a few hasty lines to announce her determination, and ask for a kind reception, and then went out and posted her letter.

When she returned she felt more tranquil, and less discontented with herself, for at eighteen one has a passion for devotion and self-sacrifice. She emptied her drawers, and packed up the trifles she cared most for—the garland of flowering blackberries worn at the ball at Salvanches, the favorite books she had read with

Gérard, two or three dried flowers gathered by him, and her modest wardrobe, so inexpensive and yet so elegant.

"Yes," she thought, while laying each object at the bottom of a large packing-case, "there will be no bitterness to spoil the pleasure of remembrance; he will always see me as I was at the ball at Salvanches, will not be sorry for having known me, and will keep a little corner of his heart for me that no cloud will ever obscure. This certainty will be my consolation when I live with strangers far from my father and him."

Every one in the house was asleep, and out-doors nothing was heard but the distant rumbling of carriages and the tick-tack of the weaver's loom. The trunk was full; Hélène wiped away a tear, shut the cover, and undressed, thinking sorrowfully that this was the last night she should pass under her father's roof.

The next day at dawn the leaden sleep that had nailed Marius to his bed for eighteen hours was slowly dissipated. The poet awoke with a parched mouth and a heavy head, perceived that his bed was unopened, and that he had slept without undressing. He rubbed his eyes, raised the window, plunged his head into cold water, and, as if this immersion had

produced a sudden condensation in his brain, misty with the fumes of wine, his memory suddenly returned. He remembered his two neighbors at the table with their malicious smile, the glasses filled to the brim with traitorous wine, Madame Grandfief's peculiar expression, and the strange way in which the conversation had been led to the subject of Gérard's love. He shook like an aspen-leaf.

"Double brute that I am!" he exclaimed, giving himself a terrible blow with his fist; "I have been guilty of an unpardonable folly!"

He ran immediately to the studio to find his sister, who was packing her brushes and box of colors.

"My poor Hélène," he commenced, with the most dejected air, "I was drunk as a student yesterday, and am afraid I said many things I ought not to say."

He told her the whole story of the breakfast. While he was talking, his memory became still clearer, and he had full consciousness of his unpardonable indiscretion.

Hélène held out her hand. "Yes, Marius," she replied, gently, "you spoke too freely, and we shall all suffer for it." In her turn, she related the scene of the Fond d'Enfer and Madame Grandfief's conduct.

Marius felt his limbs bend under him and was obliged to sit down. "Ass, idiot!" he cried, tearing

his hair; "why did you not pluck out your tongue? I understand now why this cursed prude fixed her great eyes on me! She gathered up my foolish words and profited by them. Ah! poor little sister, what will become of you? and what a miserable wretch I am!" And the colossal Marius wept like a child.

"Do not be distressed," said Hélène, touched with his despair; "none of us is faultless, and I am the most to blame. I shall not lay it up against you, you great, giddy fellow!"

She struck him lightly on the shoulder in endeavoring to take his hand.

"Things cannot remain in this state!" muttered Marius, suddenly. "I shall hasten to the Grange-Allard; Gérard is an honest man; we will go together to his father, and the venerable pigeon-wing must give his consent either by free-will or force."

"You shall do no such thing," interrupted Hélène, in a firm voice.

"What!" cried the poet, bounding up, "will you allow yourself to be compromised without demanding the reparation which is your due?"

"I wish to remain what I am, an honest girl, and give no occasion for any one to accuse me of speculating on a scandal to make a desirable marriage. It is useless to insist," she added, putting her hand upon her

brother's mouth; "my resolution is taken: I have written to Madame Le Mancel, and I shall set out for Paris this evening."

The poet, struck dumb, shrugged his shoulders.

"My good Marius, listen to me, and obey me as a punishment. Once out of the way, I shall soon be forgotten, and we must avoid at any price a scandal that would injure father. Think what would become of us if he lost his place! I shall start this evening; you must hire a carriage and accompany me to Blesmes, where I shall take the railway— That is not all: you must promise not to tell Gérard anything until I give you permission—I do not wish him to do anything rash."

She stopped a moment, took down from the wall a study of field-flowers, and added: "By-and-by, when the excitement has died away, give him this little sketch as a remembrance from me. It will remind him of our pleasant walks—"

Sobs filled her throat and prevented utterance, but she was determined to be brave until the end, and resolutely forced them back. Marius, astonished at the unusual strength of character displayed, clasped her in his arms. "I am not worthy to kiss the hem of your garment," he exclaimed; "but it makes no difference to me, if you would—"

She stopped him by a glance, showing plainly that she could not be turned from her purpose.

"Do as I tell you, leave me, and do not say a word to any one before breakfast."

Marius went out; Hélène put on her bonnet, and went by an unfrequented street to St. Stephen's Church. She was not a devotee, but she had a religion of her own, full of simple superstition and sudden fervor. She lighted a wax-taper, and the sacristan placed it on a trident where the flame of two smoky candle-ends was just dying out; then she knelt in the shadow and uttered a heart-felt prayer. "Great God," she said, "let my departure be a sufficient expiation; grant that I alone may suffer for my fault!" She dared not add, "Let not Gérard forget me!" but this supplication escaped from the depths of her heart, concealed under the wings of her prayer.

When she raised her head, the old church seemed colder and more austere than usual. The pillars, green with moisture, threw a thicker darkness over the corner where she knelt; the Christ suspended on the wall between two thieves had a heart-rending expression of dejection and suffering, and the black-marble skeleton stretched out his hour-glass toward her with a menacing gesture. Hélène shivered and quitted the church thoroughly chilled. As she turned

the corner by the prison to reach the Rue du Tribel, she met Francelin Finoël. The hunchback had seen her go into St. Stephen's and waited for her to come out.

"I should like to say a few words to you," he began, before she could escape from him; "although you have shut your door upon me, I cherish no ill-will, and you have no more sincere friend than I am—"

She quickened her steps without replying, but he was determined to follow her.

"Well!" he continued, "what I have predicted has come to pass. You are compromised and nothing else is talked about in the city. I do not believe the reports I hear, and as a proof of it I renew my proposal. Will you give me your hand in exchange for my name?"

The blood mounted to the young girl's brow. The scandal must then be very widely spread, if Finoël felt encouraged to go on in his insulting pursuit.

"You have a baser soul than I imagined," she replied, indignantly.

"And you a more tenacious hope!" he retorted; "do you still think, after what happened yesterday, that M. de Seigneulles will marry you?"

"I intend to leave the city this evening, sir, and my latest regret on going away will be that I have seen and heard you."

She stood erect, crushed the little dwarf with a disdainful look, and went home.

At breakfast, Marius whispered, "The carriage is engaged for this evening at eight o'clock."

The time had come for announcing her departure, and Hélène's heart beat violently. She could not make up her mind to tell her father, who was looking upon her with uneasy solicitude.

"I will speak to him presently," she thought, and put off incessantly the fatal moment. At last, when they rose from the table, she whispered in an unsteady voice:

"Dear father, Madame Le Mancel insists upon my coming back to her to teach drawing. I have reflected a long time on her proposition and decided to accept it."

M. Laheyrard turned pale, and Madame Laheyrard opened her mouth wide in astonishment.

"I must leave as soon as possible," continued Hélène, rapidly; "I have told my reasons to my brother and he approves—is it not so, Marius?"

The poet jabbered a few words in token of approbation, and, not knowing what else to do, began to fill his pipe.

"What does this mean?" murmured the professor; "there is no hurry."

"I must take advantage of Madame Le Mancel's offer, so I intend to set out this evening."

At this announcement, Tonton and Benjamin, who adored Hélène, began to cry, while clinging closely to her skirts.

"You are insane," exclaimed Madame Laheyrard, stupefied; "this evening! what are you thinking of? Your outfit is not ready, and your trunk is not packed!"

"I beg your pardon! I have packed all that is necessary; you can send me anything more I may require by-and-by."

"I never saw anything like it," went on the inspector's wife; "no one but you ever takes such strange fancies! What will the neighbors say when they see you gone away, as if you had committed a crime?"

"The neighbors may say what they please," replied Hélène, frankly; "I am not in the habit of caring for their opinion."

M. Laheyrard remained silent; he took his daughter's arm and led her to the garden.

"My child," sighed the poor man, "there is a reason for this sudden departure that you are concealing from me. Has any one treated you unkindly?"

"No, dear father, I am as happy as possible; only,

you know we must think of the future. The children are growing up, and your salary does not increase in the same proportion as their appetite."

"I understand—I understand, you are a brave girl; but what will become of me without you? You are my companion and my solace in all trouble. Fathers, however, must not be too selfish. Embrace me, my child!"

She threw her arms around his neck, endeavoring at the same time to suppress her tears. At nightfall, Marius appeared before the door with the cabriolet. Madame Laheyrard improved the opportunity to make a show of her grief, and was bathed in tears. The children joined in the chorus. Hélène embraced them all, leaving her last kisses for her father.

"Write me long letters," said the good old man, in a voice choked with sobs.

"It is time to set out!" cried Marius, who had the greatest difficulty in restraining his feelings; "it is late, and we must not lose the train."

Hélène seated herself in the carriage, and they started at a slow trot. Marius took a roundabout way, to avoid passing through the city. They reached the woods just as the curfew-bell was ringing for nine o'clock. Neither of them spoke a word, and nothing disturbed the silence but the sound of the horse's hoofs

on the road and the snapping of the whip that Marius kept constantly in motion.

"So you don't wish me to let Gérard know that you are going off?" said the poet, suddenly.

"No, I entreat you," replied Hélène, resolutely.

Marius, who seemed to be shocked at his sister's stoicism, indulged in an inaudible groan, and conversation again ceased. When they reached the summit of the plateau, at a point where the road commanded a vast extent of the forest, the moon, suddenly rising above the horizon, threw a flood of light over the fleece-like summit of the woods and the roofs of the farm-houses. Marius stood up on his seat, and, pointing with his whip to the sharp gables brought out in relief on the sky: "There," he murmured between his teeth, "you can see the roofs of the Grange-Allard! And then to think that Gérard is waiting there in vain, without dreaming that we are passing within gunshot of his dwelling-place!"

Hélène felt her heart beating wildly, and could not refrain from rising up on her seat to look in the direction indicated. Thanks to the bright moonlight, it was easy to distinguish the farm with its inclosures, low-walled barns, and pigeon-turret. She took in all the details with an eager glance, knowing well that she had only to pronounce one word, and Marius would need

no second bidding to whip up his horse in the direction of the farm. She would perhaps surprise Gérard, sitting in thoughtful mood in the chimney-corner, and their hands would meet once more. The temptation was strong, and a month before she would certainly have succumbed; but the troubles of the last two days had ripened her judgment and exhausted that thoughtless force that usually put her brain in commotion. She bit her lips, closed her eyes, and, throwing herself into her corner, said to her brother:

"Hurry up your horse, or we shall never reach the train in time!"

Marius relieved his feelings with a prolonged whistle, and the horse began to trot.

"Women are astonishing!" he exclaimed, looking stealthily at Hélène. "They are made up of a heap of mysterious complications that I cannot understand."

"What makes you talk in this way?" said Hélène.

"You are the provocation!" he answered. "You leave Juvigny without drum or trumpet, to go and teach children how to make eyes and ears. This is courageous, I grant; but you do not think how much your friend Gérard will have to suffer. He loves you, after all; although he is rather chicken-hearted, he loves you, and you don't appear to care anything for him."

These reflections pierced Hélène's heart like sharp arrows. She had no courage to reply, simply turning her head aside so that the moonlight might not betray the tears that filled her eyes.

"Yes," continued the poet pitilessly, while whipping his poor horse, "you women have brains entirely different from ours; you are hard, ferocious, and don't know how to love."

"Enough!" stammered she in a supplicating tone; "you are unjust!"

She hid her face in the back part of the cabriolet and pretended to go to sleep. By degrees, in consequence of the motion of the carriage and the miserable night she had passed, her eyelids grew heavy, and a light sleep closed her eyes. It was more a benumbing of the faculties than real repose, for at the least jolt her eyes opened. She saw, as in a dream, the boundary-lines of the woods beyond the open fields, the vine-covered hills with their shivering vine-branches, the elms on the road with their contorted and threatening aspect, the villages with closed doors and darkened windows, where the dogs shut up in the barns saluted the passage of the cabriolet with fierce barking. She fell again into a troubled sleep, and when she awoke they were crossing the plains of Champagne, dotted with flocks of sheep encamped near the movable

dwellings of the shepherds. The whistle of the locomotive resounded in the distance, and the lights began to sparkle. It was the station at Blesmes.

Hélène was now thoroughly awake, though her cheeks were still moistened with tears. Marius attended carefully to the luggage, and they were soon alone in the waiting-room, dimly lighted by a smoky lamp. The poor fellow then saw his sister's distressed countenance, and his sympathies were touched. Hélène, pressing her forehead against the glass door, watched the puffing of the locomotive that would soon carry her far away from all she loved.

"Adieu, my good Marius," she said; "be kind to father."

"Ah, a thousand million serpents!" exclaimed the poet, "you weep, Hélène, and but for my unpardonable heedlessness all this would not have happened! How I should like to have this cursed Grandfief shut up within four walls! I would make her pay dear for her perfidy."

"Peace, Marius! be prudent," she said, threatening him with her finger.

"Prudent! that is not in my line; but, by the furies, I swear to be revenged!"

"Passengers for Paris!" called out the official, opening the glass door.

The brother and sister embraced each other once more, then the doors were closed. Hélène sent a last kiss to Marius through the open carriage-window, and the train started.

X.

"EVERYTHING will be forgotten when I am far away," Hélène often thought when summoning up courage to leave her home. She little understood the character of provincial society, or rather she was too Parisian to comprehend it.

In Paris an event, however scandalous, may fall with a crash into the swelling ocean of the great city, but the rumor that follows it is promptly smothered by the tumult of crowds incessantly renewed, and the louder clamor of rival scandals that succeed it. It is not thus in the tranquil and silent lake of provincial life. The smallest pebble thrown into this peaceful water awakes a thousand sonorous echoes, and produces at the surface a slow succession of circles that are always widening. The inhabitant of a small city who watches, behind curtains discreetly drawn, the comings and goings of his neighbors, and makes this his only occupation, welcomes a scandal as a rare game, a treat of high relish that he must enjoy to the utmost.

He seasons it with marvelous ingredients, and cooks it at a slow fire with special refinement; he breakfasts and dines upon it for a month.

Hélène's sudden departure, far from lessening the interest in the adventure of the Fond d'Enfer, brought it out in relief, and gave occasion for new comments as ingenious as they were uncharitable. The motives for this action were too simple and generous to be considered probable; others were sought for, and imagination gave itself full play. Little Reine was one of the first to insinuate, while shaking her head, that the cause of this sudden departure was probably more serious than was generally supposed.

"When there is no reason for self-reproach," said this scrupulous person, "it is not usual to run away like a criminal, and, if Mademoiselle Laheyrard left the city by stealth, it is natural to suppose she had something to conceal."

Thereupon the grisette winked, and hummed by way of conclusion the refrain of a well-known coarse song. The worst possible reports were soon in circulation in regard to Gérard de Seigneulles and Hélène. This calumny, received at first with expressions of hypocritical incredulity, quickly made the tour of the city, and as the girl by her independent ways, witty sallies, and fascinating beauty, had roused a wide-

spread jealousy, these evil-minded suggestions were believed almost everywhere.

Madame Grandfief was one of the most implacable and dangerous of Hélène's enemies. She did not accuse her openly, but she had a terrible fashion of pretending to make excuses for her.

"For my part," she said, with a sigh, "I never believe evil reports, and Christian charity forbids rash judgments; but when I think of the deplorable education this unfortunate girl has received, I cannot help feeling that anything may be expected. No principles, no manners, and a mother who has never watched over her!—how is it possible for a young girl thus neglected to turn out well? I am never weary of saying to mothers who have daughters: 'Mothers, instill good principles into the minds of your girls; without them, all else is of no value.' God be thanked, Georgette has been brought up in a different way! I have never even sent her to a convent; she has never left me, nor had any secrets from me; and I look in her heart as in a fountain of clear water. Thus I can answer for her as for myself."

The rumors so widely circulated in regard to Hélène made a profound impression on Mademoiselle Georgette's imagination. The curious and simple-hearted girl asked herself, not without a certain anx-

iety, how the mysterious walks in the Fond d'Enfer could have produced such an excitement in the little city, and why they met with such universal condemnation? Besides, her conscience was not entirely tranquil, for this model of young girls with principles had been guilty of some trifling peccadilloes in her intercourse with Marius Laheyrard : a sonnet imprudently accepted at a ball, a prolonged pressure of hands at the end of a waltz, and even two or three very tender glances exchanged in the street. In her frank ignorance, Georgette wondered if she were not gliding into the same path where Hélène had met with such a dreadful fall. At the same time, by a singular contradiction, in the midst of these scruples she could not help thinking complacently of the handsome poet, so bold, noisy, and bewitching.

The gossip went on its way, gliding from house to house, and increasing like a ball of snow in the passage. It did not stop until it reached the threshold of the Laheyrards' house and M. de Seigneulles's gate. It even penetrated into this last dwelling with Manette, who heard it among the tradesmen. The old servant, however, knew her master well enough to keep her tongue still, and the taciturn Baptiste as usual did not breathe a word.

M. de Seigneulles, in spite of this reserve, was un-

easy ; he scented something in the wind. When he entered Madame de Travenette's drawing-room in the evening, the conversation abruptly ceased ; the guests seemed disturbed and embarrassed, and the old lady herself was constrained, and did not inquire after Gérard's health. An unexpected visitor having suddenly spoken of Mademoiselle Laheyrard's flight, a general silence followed the untimely allusion, while glances thrown obliquely toward the new-comer appeared to remind him of the chevalier's presence. M. de Seigneulles returned home in a thoughtful mood, opened his lips only to eat and drink, and went to his chamber whistling the air of "La Belle Bourbonnaise," which, according to Manette, was always the sign of a storm.

The next day—shaving-day—M. de Seigneulles was already installed in the kitchen, when Magdelinat made his appearance, with a more obsequious air and a more flexible spine than usual. The barber had heard, of course, all the rumors that had caused such a commotion in the city ; but, since the affair of the ball at the Willows, he had learned to be more circumspect, and, dearly as he loved to talk over the city gossip, he had kept silent during the whole operation. M. de Seigneulles spoke first.

"What is the news, Magdelinat ?" he asked.

"Nothing, sir—absolutely nothing."

"You are not well booked-up for a man of your profession. Didn't you know that your neighbor, Mademoiselle Laheyrard, had left Juvigny?"

"Pardon me," replied the barber, "I knew all that; but I thought it was useless to annoy you with such gossip."

"It is not gossip; it is a fact," said M. de Seigneulles, innocently.

Magdelinat looked at him in amazement. Deceived by his impassive mien, he imagined the chevalier had heard of the adventure, and cared very little about it. So, in his most honied tones:

"Yes," he said, "there is no doubt of the fact, unfortunately; but, you know, all reports are exaggerated, and we must not believe a quarter of what we hear."

M. de Seigneulles started.

"And what the deuce do you hear?" cried he, flashing his gray eyes on Magdelinat, who drew back frightened.

The unlucky hair-dresser found out too late that he had made a blunder, and tried to mend the matter.

"Stupid nonsense!" he said, in a flippant tone; "the world is so wicked! For my part, I will wager

that it is nothing but thoughtlessness, and that there is not a word of truth in all the gossip about M. Gérard."

"Gérard! By the pope's slipper! what has my son to do with this ridiculous affair?"

The chevalier started to his feet in a rage, and pushed Magdelinat into a corner of the kitchen. The hair-dresser, paler than his napkin, tried to get free, and threw despairing glances toward the door.

"If I mentioned M. Gérard," he murmured, faintly, "it was a slip of the tongue. I am the last one to accuse him."

"Accuse him!" M. de Seigneulles seized the unfortunate Magdelinat by his cravat, and, thrusting him against the wall, "Ah!" he exclaimed in a voice strangled by the shock of the insinuation, "cursed beast! you know more than you like to tell! Make haste and speak plain, or I will snatch out your miserable tongue, and nail it between two owls on the door of my wine-press!"

"What do you want me to tell?" stammered Magdelinat, half suffocated; "I only know what is talked of through the whole city. The most damaging reports are circulated everywhere about your son and the inspector's daughter."

"My son mixed up with this scandal!"

"So it seems; but I do not believe it."

"Well, believe it or not!" cried the chevalier, making Magdelinat dance about the room; "do you imagine that I care for your opinion? March off, Monsieur Magdelinat, and never put your foot in my house again!"

The hair-dresser took flight without asking for his pay; the chevalier remained standing on the threshold like a statue of stone. He was thunderstruck. Manette looked at him trembling in every limb, and in the kitchen you might have heard a pin fall. M. de Seigneulles suddenly took off his dressing-gown, and throwing it to Manette, "My coat!" he demanded in a hollow voice.

When he was dressed, he rushed to the Abbé Volland's, to consult with him upon the unfortunate affair. The curé knew that Hélène had found refuge at a boarding-school in Paris, and had heard all the scandal reported about her; although he did not believe her guilty, he was forced to own, with a sigh, that appearances were very much against the unhappy girl.

This conclusion was far from reassuring the chevalier; he remained shut up for an hour with the abbé, and had scarcely left the vicarage, when Gérard, covered with dust, appeared at a turn of the road opening upon the pasture-land. The poor fellow was a sight

to behold, with his contracted features, hollow eyes, and troubled mien! He had waited at the Grange-Allard four mortal days for Hélène's letter. He could neither sleep nor keep quiet, and every day he took hopeless walks to the verge of the forest. Every moment he was on the point of disobeying Hélène's injunctions, and hastening to Juvigny; but the fear of increasing by his presence the injury he had already inflicted kept him wandering on the outskirts of the forest, or sent him back discouraged to the Grange-Allard.

At last, on the morning of the fifth day, unable to endure the suspense any longer, he quitted the farm, and arrived at Juvigny feverish and out of breath. He crossed the pasture at a rapid pace, passed through the Rue du Tribel, and stopped before the door at the very moment when M. de Seigneulles reached it on his return from the vicarage.

The chevalier's eyes darted forth furious glances at the sight of the culprit, and he was upon the point of giving vent to his passion in the public street. The hot-headed gentleman had, however, the strength to control himself, and, pointing out the vestibule-door to Gérard, who stood with uncovered head before him, "Go to my chamber," he said; "I have something to say to you."

The tone in which this command was given left no doubt as to M. de Seigneulles's very great displeasure. Gérard read in the stormy light of his gray eyes and the rigid lines of his lips the precursors of a grand explosion.

"Well," he thought as he was mounting the stairs, "he knows the adventure of the Fond d'Enfer; so much the better. I shall escape the embarrassment of telling it myself, and the ground will be already prepared."

They reached the landing-place on the first floor, where the window looked out upon the yard and gardens. Gérard glanced stealthily in that direction, hoping to see Hélène's face behind the trees, for this would have redoubled his courage; but M. de Seigneulles did not give him the opportunity. With an imperious gesture he pushed him into his chamber.

"Monsieur," said the old gentleman, shutting the door violently, "look me in the face, and answer me frankly for once in your life. Have you heard the story that is reported in the city?"

"Yes, father," replied Gérard, convinced that the chevalier alluded to the meetings in the Fond d'Enfer.

"Then it is the truth, and you own it!" cried out M. de Seigneulles, hopelessly.

"I own it."

The chevalier was silent for a moment; his son's assurance confounded him. "What a disgrace!" he thought, "and he dares to acknowledge it! Just Heaven! in what an age we are living! You ought to hide yourself a hundred feet underground, after having been guilty of such villainy."

"The expression is rather strong!" answered Gérard, who could not help smiling at the paternal exaggeration.

"What are you made of?" retorted M. de Seigneulles, beside himself with indignation; "have you still the boldness to laugh? I said villainy, and I keep to the word; it is none too strong to express my detestation of such proceedings."

"Such proceedings are only what might be expected. You have been young, father, and you would have done as I did."

"Never!" replied the austere chevalier, struck dumb with amazement; "are you a man of honor, sir?"

"I think so."

"I begin to doubt it. Finally, in the present condition of affairs what do you intend to do?"

"That is precisely what I came to ask you," answered Gérard, with a deferential air.

"To ask me!" screamed M. de Seigneulles, losing all control of himself; "have you then no blood in your

veins? You should have taken my advice before committing the fault. You say that I have been young like you. Do you believe that, if such a misfortune had happened to me, I should have sought advice as to what course I ought to take? We had a different way of understanding our duty in my day! What should I do, sir? I should saddle a horse and hasten in search of this young girl whom you have allowed to go away after having unworthily compromised her character."

"Hélène gone away!" stammered Gérard.

"Do not pretend to be ignorant of it!" continued the chevalier, stamping across the room; "could she remain here in the situation in which you have placed her? What, then, is the matter now? where are you going?" he cried, seeing Gérard rush toward the door.

"To do what you reproach me for not having done before," responded the young man, who had become very pale; "I am going to find her."

"Stay where you are!" said M. de Seigneulles, imperiously seizing him by the arm.

"Father, let me go, I entreat you!"

"I forbid it! You have committed follies enough; I shall take the matter into my own hands and do as I think best."

Gérard, irritated by this resistance, made violent efforts to reach the door. The chevalier became furi-

ous; the young man pranced about like a wild horse under the spur, and a silent struggle commenced between them that threatened to become tragic. It was no longer father and son, but a fierce strife between two men blinded by passion. Fortunately the old guardsman had not lost his muscular force; he found once more his former vigor in the encounter, and ended by thrusting Gérard helpless and vanquished into an easy-chair. Then suddenly letting go his hold, with an activity astonishing for his age, he bounded toward the door and went out after having turned the key upon his son.

The young man, exhausted and frightened, sank down in the easy-chair. His father's reproaches and curses still resounded in his ears. All that had passed during the last quarter of an hour seemed like a nightmare. He heard vaguely in the yard Bruno's pawings while Baptiste held him by the bridle, his father's angry voice, and Manette's frightened answers.

"Bring my large valise!" ordered the chevalier.

"The valise!" the servant ventured to reply. "Holy Virgin! it is ten years since it has been used! Are you in your senses, Monsieur de Seigneulles?"

The hot-blooded chevalier replied with stampings and impatient oaths. At last, after a noisy rummage and many exclamations, the valise was buckled on the

horse's croup. Gérard, who had gone to the window, saw his father leap into the saddle, and give his horse a vigorous blow with the whip. The horse's hoofs soon resounded on the pavements of the Rue du Tribel. The chevalier had gone.

Gérard, raising his head, perceived Marius Laheyrard in the adjoining garden, smoking his pipe as he walked along the hedge of the terrace.

"Oh," he thought, "I shall have an explanation at last!"

Without troubling himself to open the door shut close by M. de Seigneulles, he let himself down from the window to the yard, not two steps from the astonished Baptiste. In two minutes he joined Marius under the trees in the orchard.

"Bravo! bravo!" exclaimed the latter, stretching out his hand; "you would not submit to be shut up like a schoolboy. I knew very well you would come to the rescue."

"Where is Hélène?" said Gérard.

"Gone," replied Marius, with a sigh. "The place was no longer tenable after the insult at the Fond d'Enfer.—Ah! my poor friend, I did you a great wrong!"

And, putting aside all false shame, the poet frankly confessed his foolish behavior at the hunter's break-

fast, and the disastrous consequences that had resulted.

"Hélène," he added, "fled to escape Madame Grandfief's malice; but I stood in the gap, and am preparing a dish after my own fashion for that detestable prude."

Gérard insisted upon knowing Hélène's residence; and Marius, after some persuasion, told him the street and house where his sister had found protection.

"Thanks!" cried young De Seigneulles; "I shall start immediately for Paris; will you go with me?"

"No, not now. I am brewing my revenge, and must not let it spoil after all my pains. But, my poor friend, what do you hope to do?"

"I wish," rejoined Gérard, in a resolute tone, "to see Hélène, convince her that my heart is unchanged, and bring her back as my wife."

His eyes sparkled, and his countenance took on an expression of unusual energy. Marius looked at him for a moment as if he did not know what to make of him; then, striking him vigorously on the shoulder:

"I like you!" he said; "you are a man! Go, then, and good luck to you! Put up at the Hôtel Parnasse. The landlord is an honest fellow; but don't mention me as a passport to favor, or he would ignominiously turn you from the door."

That same evening Gérard de Seigneulles, mounted on the outside of the omnibus, set out from Juvigny for the station at Blesmes.

XI.

M. DE SEIGNEULLES during all this time was urging his horse to its utmost speed to reach the same station. The impatient chevalier, feeling that the mile-stones would never come to an end, spurred the pacific Bruno till he bled, the poor animal being unable to comprehend the great departure from the accustomed pace. The old gentleman, in spite of his aversion for railways and all modern inventions, heartily wished himself in a railway-carriage rolling swiftly toward Paris.

"There are persons in the world at this very moment," he thought, "who have a right to accuse the De Seigneulles of a disloyal action. The family escutcheon now bears upon its azure field, hitherto immaculate, an ignominious black stain."

This idea alone made the warm blood mount to his brow. He felt that there would be no rest until this stain was effaced. He did not yet know what course

he should adopt to take away the dishonor, and hardly dared to let his mind rest on the delicate point.

"Before everything else," he said to himself, while lamenting bitterly over the necessity to which his son's folly had reduced him, "I must see the fatal creature. What kind of a person is she? God alone knows! Some adventurer, perhaps, with inveigling glances and boldly bewitching ways. If Gérard could only have committed this folly with some bashful and reserved girl! But no, he must hit upon one of those Parisian sirens without principles and without education!"

He detested Hélène cordially, and wished she had never come to Juvigny, to overturn his projects and spoil his son's future. At the same time, by a strange contradiction, he could not think of this girl of eighteen ruined by Gérard's fault, without boiling over with indignation. Aristocratic pride, the sentiment of honor and paternal selfishness, fought formidable battles in this contracted but loyal soul.

"I shall have no peace until I have seen her," he exclaimed, as he rode across the fields; "horrible road, it is interminable!"

The distance, however, gradually diminished. M. de Seigneulles saw from the top of the hill the railway-buildings, and heard the whistle of a locomotive. He

feared the train would start without him, spurred up his horse once more, and rode down the hill at the top of his speed. At a turn in the road Bruno stumbled and fell, and the furious old gentleman was thrown upon a heap of stones. Some peasants at work in a neighboring field came to the rescue ; they picked up M. de Seigneulles, who was in a pitiable condition, unable to move, and with the skin torn from his face ; as for Bruno, he was frightfully broken-kneed. It was only a little way to the village ; he was carried to the tavern, his poor, lame horse following, and the railway physician was sent for.

M. de Seigneulles suffered great pain in his left leg, and bit his lips so as not to cry out when he was being undressed ; but the physical suffering was nothing in comparison to the mental irritation that he endured at the thought of the delay caused by his unlucky fall. The physician, after having examined him thoroughly, decided that no bones were broken. The leg was badly bruised, and perceptibly swollen.

"It is nothing," he said ; "drink arnica, apply ten leeches above the knee, and all will be right."

"I shall be well enough to set out again to-morrow?" asked M. de Seigneulles, with great anxiety.

"No ; but in four days, if you are prudent.—Ten leeches, do you understand?"

"Four days!" growled the chevalier, as soon as the doctor had departed; "this fellow wants me to die."

Then, sitting up as well as he could, he ordered forty leeches to be sent for immediately.

"Pardon me," objected the landlord; "the doctor said ten."

"The doctor is an ass," replied M. de Seigneulles, imperiously; "obey me!"

When the forty leeches arrived, the chevalier sent every one out of the room, and took it upon himself to apply above his knee the whole forty in succession. As a military man, he had little faith in any remedies excepting for horses, and he reasoned in this marvelous manner:

"If I must stay in the house four days by using ten leeches, by quadrupling the dose I can be on my feet to-morrow."

He called this energetic treatment. It was, in fact, very energetic, for at the end of three hours the dauntless old gentleman, losing so much blood, and paler than his sheets, very nearly fainted away, and had only strength enough left to call for assistance. The physician, sent for in haste, and informed of his patient's prowess, uttered loud exclamations.

"You are in a pretty condition!" he growled,

"and you will have to stay in now for a fortnight. Never did I see such a fool!"

M. de Seigneulles, at any other time, would have severely rebuked the insolence of the country Æsculapius, but he had not even strength enough to be angry. He contented himself with giving utterance to a melancholy sigh, and buried himself in the bedclothes.

While Gérard's father was chafing in his unwilling imprisonment at the tavern in Blesmes, Marius Laheyrard was revolving in his mind many schemes for taking vengeance on Madame Grandfief. The intolerant conceit of this cross-grained woman, who set herself up for a judge in the city, had always singularly irritated the poet's nerves; and he felt that he could never pardon the plot of the Fond d'Enfer and Hélène's departure. Every morning he awoke swearing not to leave the country till he had humbled the haughty woman's pride. Meantime, to make himself as disagreeable as possible, he paid court to her daughter Georgette.

Ever since the ball at Salvanches, when Mademoiselle Grandfief had accepted one of his sonnets, Marius had perceived that she regarded him with a favorable eye. I do not know whether she had sufficiently appreciated the poet's flaming and eccentric strains,

but a girl always welcomes with pleasure verses that she thinks have been inspired by her charms. Georgette had carefully preserved young Laheyrard's rhymes, and often read them over secretly, without knowing much about what they meant. The gay Marius was just the lover to please this unsuspecting girl. An intrepid dancer, and fond of good cheer, having a florid countenance and a bushy beard, a bold eye, and a golden tongue, he appeared to Georgette as being singularly seductive and irresistible.

Girls strictly brought up often take a fancy to worthless fellows, and Mademoiselle Grandfief found the poet's love as savory as forbidden fruit. She met Marius almost every time she went out, and for a long time he had not failed to be present at high mass at St. Stephen's Church. Seated not far from her, he darted burning glances upon her, and diverted her mind from her sacred duties in a way which, if sinful, was also delightful. The poet's wild daring made her shudder, and this added another charm to the clandestine courtship. Marius had not put his foot in Madame Grandfief's house since the famous breakfast; but on moonlight nights Georgette, leaning her elbow on her chamber-window, saw him roaming around the inclosures of Salvanches, and, in her simplicity, fancied him already scaling the walls and hanging a rope-

ladder to her balcony. She went to bed, her heart throbbing with innocent fear, dreamed of her lover, got up sometimes to run barefooted to the window and see if he were not still there standing under one of the plane-trees of the silent avenue.

Marius himself by degrees became interested in this love-making, commenced in bravado, and continued for the pleasure of vexing Madame Grandfief. The appetizing beauty of this little provincial, her cheeks like ripening peaches, her black eyes hypocritically cast down, and her red and sensuous lips, had a seductive power over this robust youth whose Rabelaisian tastes were always at war with his funereal and homesick poetry. His imagination was excited; his heart, calm at first, was moved in its turn; in short, what had been nothing but play in the beginning ended by becoming not a grand passion—Marius was not made for such sentiments—but a very active and sufficiently serious caprice.

The vintage was close at hand. This is the time when the landscape at Juvigny, ordinarily too green or gray, suddenly takes on tints of a southern intensity and magnificence. The beam-tree berries redden in the woods, the beeches turn to a reddish brown, and the oaks wear all the tan-colored shades. The forest undulates in the distance like a sea with sombre waves

of a purplish violet, and, beyond the vineyards especially, the eye enjoys a true feast of colors brilliantly varied and artistically blended. Autumn throws a mantle over the soft undulations of the hills, recalling the wonders of the richest Oriental tissues. The vine-branches, transformed by maturity, display all the various hues of red and yellow, brilliant crimson, pale green, ruddy gold, and the rosy tints of morning, all harmonious and melodious like a magic symphony. The silvery foliage of the willows below, and the pearly mist of the horizon above, unite softly with the intense coloring of the woods and vineyards, the verdure of the meadows, and the azure of the sky. The last days of the season, almost always marked by fine weather, increase the joyous aspect of the country.

All Juvigny then enjoys a holiday. The vine is the principal riches of the soil, and, when the harvest is abundant, every proprietor opens several bottles of old wine from the depths of his cellar in honor of the new vintage. The vintagers, as soon as the day dawns, march round the streets in companies, singing as they go; the roads are all day long furrowed with *bêlons* loaded with grapes; the wine-presses open their great doors and reveal in their obscure depths enormous vats, and huge casks ranged along the walls. Toward noon, the matrons and maidens start for the vineyards, and

mingle with the laborers. They carry a lunch and eat it in the open air, on the shady border of a meadow; then they go to the willow-plantations, and dance on the close-cut greensward while the echoes repeat their shouts and songs. They return to the city at dusk, and the day ends with a grand feast, with an abundance of wine, and resounding with outbursts of laughter. It is a time for freedom and noisy merriment; all ranks are blended, and all prudishness is laid aside. The soft fragrance that exhales from the wine-presses, and embalms the air, induces also this entire absence of restraint, this utter abandonment to the pleasures of the hour.

Marius Laheyrard did not fail to be present at the provincial feasts, for he hoped to meet Mademoiselle Grandfief. The god of lovers was on his side, for, going one beautiful afternoon to the vineyard of one of his friends, he found Georgette and the proprietor's daughters mingling with and helping the women to gather the grapes. To crown his good fortune she had come alone, as her mother, kept at home by a headache, had consented to intrust her to a friend. It was a precious godsend to the poet, and he improved the opportunity, as you may well suppose. They gathered the luscious fruit side by side, eating from the same bunch, tasting from the same plate, and taking

advantage of the familiarity of the dance to press each other's hands. When they returned to the city in the evening the owner of the vineyard invited Marius to stay to supper, and at dessert opened two bottles of champagne in honor of the ladies. Georgette, who did not disdain the foaming wine, allowed herself to be tempted, and drained a full glass. The poet, on his side, did not mince the matter, and when they rose from table their brains were excited, their eyes sparkling, and their tongues ready to chatter all kinds of nonsense.

Georgette's maid was waiting for her, and she was obliged to go home. She went to an adjoining room to put on her mantle and get ready. Marius, very jolly, and not knowing very well what he was about, managed in the general confusion to leave the dining-room and go in search of the girl. He was roving slowly around in the half-lighted corridor when, from the head of the stairway, he saw Mademoiselle Grandfief coming toward him. She was mounting the stairs in a merry mood, humming a waltz and holding her straw hat in her hand. Never had she appeared so pretty to Marius, with her hair coquettishly disordered, her cheeks red as roses, and her mouth beaming with smiles. I have already said that Marius did not spare the champagne, and Georgette was somewhat under its

influence. The walk they had taken together, the light excitement of eating grapes from the same bunch, and the gayety of the supper, had all mounted into her head. She was so fresh and attractive, and the staircase landing was so solitary, that Marius could not resist the impulse which suddenly took possession of him. He seized both her hands in his and, encouraged by her smile, impressed a kiss upon her open lips! She was utterly astounded at first; whether from bewilderment, or terror, or perhaps also because she found in this impertinent kiss an enjoyment she had never tasted before, she did not even move, and Marius—poets are full of self-conceit—fancied she did not resent his bold advance. Suddenly she uttered a faint cry; a door had just been opened, and Reine Lecomte, who was one of the vintagers, appeared upon the threshold. Mademoiselle Grandfief disengaged herself with an indignant air and made her escape, covered with blushes, while Marius, with that intense self-assurance induced by slight intoxication, descended the stairs enchanted with his adventure, smacking his lips at the remembrance of the kiss, and murmuring to himself, "Caught at last, Madame Grandfief!"

Georgette returned to Salvanches in a confused and meditative mood. She experienced within herself a strange, uneasy sensation, made up of terror and pleas-

ure, anguish and languor. She still felt the pressure of those audacious lips upon her own, and, though she blushed to confess it even to herself, she wished the kiss might be prolonged for hours. Soon, however, a terrible fear took possession of her superstitious and ingenuous soul. She had committed a sin, and it must be a frightful sin, since it left behind a fever so disquieting and yet so sweet! Hélène Laheyrard, cruelly punished and compromised, had not perhaps committed a worse fault. What if, by some punishment of Heaven, this detestable sin should have the same fatal consequences for her as for the inspector's daughter!

This strange fear made her shiver from head to foot. She could think of nothing else, and when alone in her little chamber her fright redoubled. She looked at herself for a moment in the mirror, and quickly turned away her head, for the brilliancy of her eyes frightened her. Some great and terrible change had surely taken place in her; she had a fever, and shook like an aspen-leaf.

"Oh! what will become of me?" she thought, burying her brown head in the pillow; "and then Reine's wicked tongue, who saw everything and will tell everything! To-morrow I shall be the laughing-stock of the city."

She sobbed as if her heart would break, did not go to sleep till it was very late, and dreamed all night of Hélène Laheyrard.

The poor girl ran to her mirror as soon as she awoke. Seeing the dark rings around her eyes, her contracted features, and her pale lips, she felt that there could be no doubt. Certainly she too was ruined. How could she endure her mother's severely inquiring glance? She must, however, make her appearance, and went down to breakfast with a trembling heart. Fortunately, Madame Grandfief, absorbed in preparations for the wash, did not notice her daughter's changed appearance. Georgette was silent and anxious during the whole morning. Every time she passed in front of the glass she started with fright at the sight of her pale face, and her fears redoubled. Her agitation and sadness did not escape the eye of Abbé Volland, who came to Salvanches in the afternoon. The curé had known Georgette from her infancy, and still treated her as a little child. He was a close observer, and was greatly struck with the unexpected change in a face usually so open and inexpressive. He fancied that Georgette regretted her broken engagement with Gérard, suffered more from the disappointment than she was willing to allow, and resolved to come to an explanation with her. When he

was taking leave of Madame Grandfief, he said to Georgette:

"I have something to say to you in regard to the altar-cloth the young ladies of the rosary are embroidering for the chapel of the Virgin; come and see me to-morrow at the vicarage after the nine o'clock mass."

This invitation increased still more Mademoiselle Grandfief's anxiety. Doubtless the curé already knew the whole adventure, and the idea of being questioned made her tremble. She passed a miserable night, and the next day a terrible shivering took possession of her when she raised the heavy knocker of the door at the vicarage. The curé had just returned, and was waiting for her in the library. He sent away his old housekeeper as soon as he saw her, placed with the skill of an examining magistrate his chair so that the light should fall directly upon his visitor, then, taking Georgette by the hand and seating her in front of him:

"Well! my dear child," he commenced, "what is the news at Salvanches?"

"Nothing, sir; mamma is getting ready for the wash, and papa is away hunting."

"And what are you doing? I fear you are not enjoying yourself very much, you have such a long face."

Georgette trembled, and became still more pale.

"Nothing is the matter with me, I assure you," she

replied, casting down her eyes under the curé's fixed gaze.

"Then, why have you such a troubled face?"

The Abbé Volland gave her a searching glance above his spectacles, and noticed that she lost countenance.

"I tell you that you have changed," he went on; "no one looks agitated as you do without some reason. Now, my child, do not deceive me, but tell me all your little troubles. I am not severe like your mother, and you may safely trust in me."

"Oh! sir," cried Georgette, with her eyes still downcast, and wringing her hands, "I should never dare to tell you!"

"Is it, then, something very bad?" demanded the abbé, with an encouraging smile.

"It is impossible to tell," murmured Georgette; then, as if impelled by the fear and remorse that were suffocating her: "Sir, I have committed a great fault," she stammered, trembling all over.

"A fault?" repeated the abbé, a little disconcerted. He saw Mademoiselle Georgette's frightened face, and continued in a more severe tone, "Do you wish me to listen to you in the confessional?"

"Oh!" she replied, with a tragic expression, "that is useless, for I shall be obliged to tell the whole story to my mother."

The curé gave such a start that his chair rolled backward.

"Tell me!" he exclaimed, much disturbed; "what is the matter, and what have you been doing?"

"I believe," sighed the poor child, "I believe that I am—that I am like Hélène Laheyrard!"

She covered her face with her hands. The Abbé Volland, frightened, stood erect on his short legs.

"Heavens!" he muttered, "what kind of a story are you telling me? Have you lost your senses? Let us see, my child; explain the matter more clearly, and with greater frankness. What has happened? Faults like those of which you speak are committed neither by thinking nor even by wishing. One cannot sin in that way entirely alone."

The curé wiped his brow, for this delicate form of questioning made the perspiration fall from his face in great drops.

"I was not alone," answered Georgette; then melting into tears, and becoming suddenly more communicative: "Ah! sir, I am certainly ruined!"

"Holy Virgin!" cried the curé, astounded, and clasping his hands; "who is the villain base enough to—"

"M. Marius Laheyrard."

"Marius!—again! There is a fatality about this

family! Unhappy child, tell me all; it is of no use to conceal anything now. Where did it happen?"

"On the stairway at M. Corrard's," sobbed Georgette.

"On a stairway? Shameless impudence!" cried the abbé, beside himself. "What did he do? how was it? Speak!"

And, step by step, he gained possession of the secret sin that burdened Mademoiselle Grandfief's breast. She confessed everything, trembling like a leaf: the assiduous attention that, encouraged by her, Marius had paid to her during the afternoon in the vineyard, the influence of the champagne at supper, finally the kiss, the terrible kiss on her lips, and the pleasure with which she had received it!

"And then?" growled the indignant abbé.

"That is all," murmured Georgette, drowned in tears and confusion.

The curé drew a long breath, as if he had been relieved of a great burden.

"You have told me the whole truth?"

"Alas! yes, reverend sir."

The Abbé Volland could scarcely repress a smile, in spite of the anxiety he felt. Such unaffected simplicity amazed him. He remained silent, apparently contemplating the sleeve of his cassock. After a

while, he turned to Georgette, who, confused and tearful, was waiting for him to speak.

"My dear child," said the curé, gravely, "dry your eyes, and do not be uneasy. Providence is merciful, and the penalty you fear never comes—the first time. But take heed to your steps, for I will not be responsible in case of a second offense."

He rose from his seat to conceal a desire to laugh, and walked backward and forward, while Georgette wiped her cheeks, and became a little more tranquil.

"The affair," he continued, after having given her a severe lecture, "is none the less deeply to be regretted. I hope this worthless Marius will keep the secret of his insane folly—I shall call him to a strict account for such conduct—and, Heaven be thanked! we may avoid a new scandal."

"Some one saw us there," murmured Georgette, humbly. And she told the story of Reine Lecomte's sudden appearance.

"The pest!" the Abbé Volland could not help saying; "she spoils everything! That girl has a viper's tongue, and has doubtless circulated the gossip everywhere already. Now I shall be obliged to talk with your mother."

At the mention of this word, Mademoiselle Geor-

gette began to weep afresh, in a way that touched the abbé's heart.

"Never mind," he said, sending her home partially reassured, "don't be troubled; I will take everything upon myself, and manage that you shall not be scolded."

He went to Salvanches the same day, had a private interview with Madame Grandfief, and related to her all that had happened.

At the first words, the virtuous matron went into a violent passion against Marius, declaring that she would go herself and denounce his insolence in the courts of justice.

"Pray be calm!" replied the abbé, gently; "on the contrary, this deplorable story must be hushed up as much as possible on Georgette's account. Unfortunately, silence is impossible: there was a witness to the scene. Reine Lecomte, the seamstress, saw it all."

The revelation increased still more Madame Grandfief's wrath.

"Very well!" she exclaimed; "this is an additional reason for holding up the shameless fellow to public indignation, and proclaiming aloud Georgette's innocence!"

"Pardon me!" said the abbé; "you must look at things as they are. M. Laheyrard is certainly very

guilty, but Georgette has some small sins to reproach herself with: she confessed to me that she did nothing to discourage the young madcap. On the contrary—"

"It is impossible," interrupted Madame Grandfief; "my daughter has been too well brought up—"

The abbé shook his head, and related all the young girl had confided to him. Madame Grandfief was utterly confounded.

"Am I so unhappy?" she went on, after a long silence; "a girl in whom I have inculcated such good principles! I shall be the butt of the town. What shall I do, Monsieur Curé?"

"There is one remedy for the evil," the abbé ventured to reply; "Georgette loves M. Laheyrard: let her marry him."

Madame Grandfief bounded from her seat—her whole nature was in rebellion at the idea—and uttered loud exclamations.

"Never!" she cried; "my daughter enter such a family after Mademoiselle Laheyrard's scandalous behavior! I should die of shame!"

"Ah! madame," replied the curé, "who told you that Hélène was guilty? What has just taken place ought to teach you to make allowance. Georgette is innocent, and yet to-morrow the same absurd stories

will be circulated in regard to her. Take my advice: bury the whole thing, and put a stop to the stories by a speedy marriage."

"I would rather shut my daughter up in a convent!" replied the inflexible matron, turning all her anger against Georgette; "she is an unnatural child, and I must punish her."

"She is sufficiently punished by the terror she has endured," rejoined the curé; "it is best to avoid scandal, and to act like a prudent mother."

"A marriage under such conditions, when my daughter has refused opportunities so much better! No, it is impossible."

"At least," concluded the abbé, taking his hat and making his bow, "reflect carefully and weigh the matter on both sides. I will see you again to-morrow."

XII.

While these things were going on at Salvanches, M. de Seigneulles had recovered from the ill-effects produced by the inconsiderate application of the forty leeches. As soon as his physician gave him permission he took one of the early trains and reached Paris at

nightfall without hinderance. He installed himself in an old-fashioned and quiet hotel, where he had put up under the Restoration. Early the next morning, having carefully arrayed himself in his broad-brimmed hat, long overcoat, and white cravat, he directed his course toward the establishment where Hélène Laheyrard had found refuge.

Madame Le Mancel's boarding-school was located in the unfrequented portion of the Rue de Vaugirard adjoining the Boulevard Montparnasse. The chevalier had not advanced thirty steps along the high walls of this deserted quarter when he stopped short, with every appearance of a violent surprise. He made a spy-glass of one of his hands and gave utterance to an energetic oath, while carefully inspecting another early pedestrian, whose face was half hidden by the turned-up collar of his overcoat, and who was no other than Gérard. The young man, leaning against the wall, was contemplating in melancholy mood a high porte-cochère, painted green, above which was placed this inscription: "*Institution de madame Le Mancel, fondée en* 1838." Behind this door, in the yard in front of the house, two great plane-trees swayed their branches, half despoiled of leaves. Between them the main body of the house was visible, with its closed windows.

"Zounds!" cried the chevalier; "I always find you, sir, where you ought not to be!"

Gérard started on recognizing M. de Seigneulles, but quickly regaining his self-possession—

"Father—" he commenced.

"What the deuce did you come here for?" interrupted the chevalier, impetuously.

"To repair the wrong I have done."

"Have you seen the young woman?"

"No," replied Gérard, piteously; "she was ill during the first week after I came, and I could not see her; now she has recovered, and I am refused admittance."

"That is exactly right, and your persistence is improper. It is my duty to see Mademoiselle Laheyrard," rejoined M. de Seigneulles, raising the knocker on the green door.

"Allow me to go in with you," said the youth, in a supplicating voice.

"Certainly not!"

The door was half open; Gérard seized his father's arm.

"Father, you are going to see Hélène; be good to her, do not drive me to despair!"

"Really! you presume to give me lessons in propriety? Take care of your own affairs, and go home."

The chevalier spoke peremptorily, as if the Rue de Vaugirard were close by the Rue du Tribel, instead of being sixty miles away.

"Or, rather," he rejoined, after a moment's hesitation, "wait for me here, in the street."

M. de Seigneulles entered the yard, and the heavy door was closed. He had prepared a note, in which he had written in his great, back-handed writing:

"The Chevalier de Seigneulles desires an interview with Mademoiselle Laheyrard."

He intrusted it to the porter, to be delivered to the young woman, and a quarter of an hour after was ushered into a little room where Hélène was at work. A bookcase, with a few books, some straw chairs, and a table, on which stood a glass containing an autumnal rose in full bloom, formed the simple furniture of the room; the chevalier entered in the most solemn manner, his head erect in his white cravat, his brow wrinkled, and his lips contracted.

Hélène, much agitated by the announcement of the unexpected visitor, received him standing near the table. Her beautiful curly hair, the disorderly arrangement of which had scandalized M. de Seigneulles so much at their first interview, was tied back with a blue ribbon, and discreetly encircled her pale face.

"Mademoiselle," began the chevalier, brusquely, "I am M. de Seigneulles."

Hélène bowed.

"I have never failed to fulfill my duty under any circumstances," he continued, "and, although in this unfortunate affair you have suffered the greater wrong—"

"M. de Seigneulles," interrupted the girl, with much spirit, "you are cruel! I am sufficiently punished in being separated from all those I love, and you ought to spare me reproaches, even though merited."

The chevalier was taken by surprise. The charming music of Hélène's voice fascinated him in spite of his prejudice against her, and softened in a strange fashion the hard fibres of a heart resisting the influence like an ancient oak. He raised his eyes, and could not help admiring the young girl's simple and dignified attitude. He expected heedless words, recriminations, or a flood of tears, and was confounded by her proud and resigned bearing.

"Allow me to finish," he answered; "you did not understand me. Your conduct personally does not concern me, but it is my duty to be concerned for what my son has done, and to make reparation for his

folly. I am a gentleman, and I uphold the honor of my family."

"Pardon me, M. de Seigneulles, I do not understand you at all."

"I am going to explain myself more clearly," replied the chevalier, irritated by Mademoiselle Laheyrard's want of discernment, and, as he did not possess the art of softening his meaning, he added, in a grumbling tone:

"My son has done you a great injury, and we owe you a reparation."

"A reparation!" murmured Hélène, looking at him in speechless astonishment.

"Yes," he went on, "however great the sacrifice, we are in the habit of paying our debts without hesitation."

This time the girl fancied she understood his meaning only too plainly. She thought that M. de Seigneulles had taken it into his head to offer her a pecuniary compensation as the price of her departure from Juvigny.

"Did I understand you?" she stammered, indignantly; "what do you mean by these words about debt and payment? Did you come here to make a bargain with me?"

"What's that?" inquired M. de Seigneulles, as-

tonished. These last words had reawakened all his prejudice, for country-people always distrust Parisians and are much afraid of becoming their dupes. The suspicious and calculating disposition of the native of Lorraine regained the upper hand. He thought that he was perhaps dealing with one of those crafty persons who make a great outcry in order to increase their price by resistance, and he resolved to put Hélène to the proof. He scrutinized with his small gray eyes the girl's clear glances.

"And what if I did?" he answered, boldly.

"It would be the worst punishment possible for me."

"So you would refuse my offers, whatever they were?"

"Yes, certainly I should," exclaimed Hélène, passionately; "what an opinion you must have of me! I am not of noble birth, but I have a soul as noble in its aspirations as your own. Not a word more, sir! Will you have the goodness to leave me?"

She advanced toward the door. The chevalier, confused, but inwardly delighted, regarded her with increasing kindness.

"But," he muttered, "you cannot prevent me from making amends for my son's offenses?"

"Your son could commit no offenses against me,

because he loves me," she replied with a sad smile, "and the wrongs of which you speak are imaginary."

"Imaginary? How can that be, since you were forced to leave Juvigny?"

"My departure was planned long ago, and I only anticipated it by a few weeks."

"But you went away—compromised."

"In the eyes of those who hate me, perhaps; but, in my own eyes and in those of my friends, not in the least. It were hard indeed if, because I loved some one honorably, and left my home to avoid becoming a source of trouble in the family of the one I loved, I must be compromised! No, sir, my conscience is at rest, and my honor is intact."

"Pardon me," objected the chevalier, "this is not the way your best friends talk in Juvigny."

"What do they say?" cried Hélène, amazed.

"They pretend," he began—but the avowal was not easy to make; he stopped, regarded for a moment the girl's charming face, her intelligent brow, her eyes so limpid and sincere, her mobile mouth, and the lips too pure and strong ever to have allowed a falsehood to pass over them. The poor chevalier felt more and more embarrassed.

"Pardon me," he resumed, in a more gentle tone, "for dwelling upon this delicate subject; but I came

here to speak frankly. The worst possible stories are circulated and believed in Juvigny about you and my son, and it is also said that you were obliged to leave the city."

Hélène's eyes seemed to increase in size as he went on with his story. She blushed at first, then suddenly became very pale; her heart was oppressed, and her pale lips uttered a faint groan. Unable to articulate a word, she made a sign to beg the chevalier to stop; then she sat down by the table, her countenance full of trouble and her glance fixed.

"They say this about me—about me?" she murmured.

M. de Seigneulles, much disturbed, looked at her, and began to regret having spoken so rudely. The old guardsman had found himself more at ease in 1830, in front of the barricades, than in a *tête-à-tête* with this young girl absorbed in silent grief. There was a sincerity in Hélène's exclamation, an expression of honesty in all her features, that made the chevalier ashamed of having so readily believed the gossip of people in Juvigny.

"Mademoiselle!" he ventured to say timidly.

Hélène started. "O my father! my poor father!" she cried.

The thought of M. Laheyrard's despair, if he heard

of this calumny, brought forth a flood of grief that she tried in vain to repress. Her breast swelled, her eyes filled with tears, and her sobs burst forth. It was one of those unaffected and resistless outbursts such as children have, a storm of tears that seemed as if it would never cease. M. de Seigneulles was greatly moved at the sad spectacle. Remembering the afternoon when he had witnessed the touching exhibition of Hélène's affection for her father, he readily understood the anguish that found expression in her cry.

"Her first thought was for her father," said the chevalier to himself; "decidedly I have misjudged her."

He approached her in a softened and repentant mood. At the same moment, Hélène's pretty blond head, yielding to the weight of this deep sorrow, fell back, and M. de Seigneulles thought she was going to faint. The inflexible chevalier, distracted and not knowing what to do, knelt hastily down before the young girl, and suddenly bending his haughty gray head, kissed her hand, with the minute and tender precaution of a father for his sick child.

"Pardon me!" she said, through her tears. "This blow was too much for me; it was so sudden and unexpected! I thought immediately of the injury these wicked reports would do my father. I was then amazed that any one could imagine such a thing. I

entreat you, sir, do not believe that I have so far forgotten myself. Your son's love for me has always been as respectful as it was devoted; I swear this to you, and he will confirm what I say. Why has he not told you so already?"

"Why?" murmured the chevalier, confused; "because I would not let him speak; I took fire like gunpowder and started off. But," resumed he, solemnly, "his word is unnecessary: I believe you, mademoiselle, and on my knees humbly beg your pardon."

Hélène wiped her eyes, and, suddenly perceiving the chevalier on his knees before her, reached out her hand to force him to rise.

"You must not beg my pardon, Monsieur de Seigneulles; it is I who ought to entreat your forgiveness for having disturbed your repose, and thwarted your wishes."

The chevalier by an emphatic gesture refused to listen to any apologies on her part.

"You must be indulgent to me," she went on, turning her dark eyes toward him, "I have been so badly brought up! When I went to Juvigny, I fancied that I could do as I pleased—my mother took scarcely any care of me; and my father," she added with a faint smile, "was not severe like many others. He spoiled me with indulgence!"

"That is the reason you love him so much!" sighed M. de Seigneulles.

"Oh! yes, and one of my greatest sorrows every day is that I cannot embrace him."

"Be patient, and you shall receive compensation for all your suffering when you return."

Hélène shook her head.

"I shall never return to Juvigny," she said, in a firm voice.

"You must not say that!" exclaimed the chevalier. "I shall compel you to go!"

"You, sir?" She looked at him in amazement.

"I, certainly! Do you imagine that I endured the jolting on that cursed railway for no other purpose than to make you shed tears? Can you not understand why I am here?"

Hélène's face lighted up a little, and amazement gave place to an emotion that at least was not painful.

"But, sir," she stammered, "I think—I do not know—"

"Do you, then, love my son no longer?"

She blushed, and her lips moved, but the words could not find utterance.

"Do not reply!" cried the impetuous chevalier. "Wait, I will come back!"

He darted out of the room, descended the stairway four steps at a time, and went in search of Gérard, who was awaiting the result, a prey to all the terrors of expectation.

"Follow me!" ordered M. de Seigneulles, in a tone of stern authority.

The young man and his father slowly remounted the stairs, to the great astonishment of the curious pupils of the Le Mancel Institution. When they entered the little room where Hélène, standing and trembling in every limb, was wondering if she were in a dream, the chevalier bowed respectfully.

"Mademoiselle Hélène," he said, "I have the honor to ask your hand for my son, Gérard de Seigneulles;" then turning to his son: "Well, sir," he added, "kiss the hand of your betrothed."

There was a shout, a double shout, in the little chamber of the boarding-school. Gérard seized Hélène's hands and covered them with kisses. The sun itself broke forth in honor of the festival, the October mist cleared up, and a brilliant beam of sunshine, passing through the curtains, played upon the young girl's blond curls, the petals of the blooming rose, and Gérard's head inclined before the being he loved and whom he could at last call his own. The austere chevalier, from a corner of the apartment, contemplated

the love-scene, listened to the sound of the caresses, and felt a singular hoarseness seize him by the throat. There were even tears in his eyes, and, ashamed of the overpowering emotion, he tried to force them back within his breast with an oath.

Hélène heard the exclamation and raised her head; snatching her hands from Gérard, she made a quick movement of her eyes toward his father. The youth understood it, rushed to the old gentleman, and pressed him in his arms: for the first time a genuine and warm-hearted embrace united M. de Seigneulles and his son.

The excitement was great in Juvigny, when the idlers lounging in front of the Hôtel Rose d'Or, one morning not long after, saw Gérard alight from the railway-omnibus followed by Hélène and the chevalier.

M. de Seigneulles, looking ten years younger, and drawing himself up to his full height, offered his arm gallantly to Hélène. Gérard, whose radiant face proclaimed his happiness, walked by her side, and all three went at a slow pace to the upper city by way of the clock-tower hill, while the shopkeepers stood at their doors to see them pass.

The chevalier's respectful bearing and Gérard's bright countenance indicated plainly enough the happy

end of the adventure; but, if doubts still lingered in any one's mind, Madame Laheyrard's triumphant appearance the next day after her daughter's return was sufficient to dissipate them. The inspector's wife almost burst her skin, she was so prodigiously inflated by her vanity. She relieved her mind by boasting about the bride and spreading abroad the details of all the arrangements as far as she knew them. By a reaction not uncomman among the inhabitants of small cities, where every one pays court to success, the prejudices heaped up against Hélène were succeeded by a sudden infatuation. Every one vied with his neighbor in a loud protest against the absurdity of the scandal circulated on her account, and every one, from the beginning, had predicted the happy conclusion of Gérard's love; even Magdelinat asserted that he had played an important part in bringing about the happy event. As one piece of good fortune never comes alone, the news of Hélène's engagement completed the triumph over Madame Grandfief's scruples. She made the best of the circumstances, accepted Marius for a son-in-law, and in this way the amiable Abbé Volland had the happiness of giving his blessing to the two couples one after the other.

After the ceremony, young Laheyrard's poetic gloss, existing only above the epidermis, rapidly scaled away;

the underlying citizen reappeared, and the author of "*Poèmes orgiaques*" became an honest member of the community, eating his four meals a day and "sleeping soundly without glory."

The chevalier's sombre dwelling was transformed under the reviving influence of Hélène's and Gérard's love. Old houses, where love enters, grow young again, and M. de Seigneulles renewed his youth in the affectionate atmosphere that surrounded him. The most surprising result of the two marriages was, that they determined a third one which was entirely unexpected; it was Finoël's! The hunchback, out of spite, decided to marry the crafty and coquettish Reine Lecomte. Since that event everything has succeeded with him; he is very happy, and has many children.

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